

IMAGINATION AND EMPATHY
IN THE NOVELS OF JANET FRAME

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the claims Janet Frame makes for the imagination in her novels and three volumes of autobiography. Proceeding from an outline of the Romantics' conception of the imagination, the thesis moves on to a discussion of the philosopher Immanuel Kant's theories of the imagination, and concludes that there are striking similarities in the arguments that both Kant and Frame make for the imagination. The argument of the thesis is structured along the development of Frame's oeuvre, and is discussed in terms of three broad phases which I have labelled romantic or modernist, apocalyptic postmodernist and finally transcendental postmodernist, and Ihab Hassan's writings on postmodernism have been used to outline the features of this third phase. A major feature of the first two of these phases is the narcissism of those characters that Frame deems imaginative, and the thesis demonstrates the attempts Frame makes to resolve the narcissism of her characters by reconciling them to their role in society, while allowing them to keep their artistic authenticity. The writings of psycho-analyst Heinz Kohut are used in the discussion of narcissism, and they complement Kant's writings on the imagination in their emphasis on the importance of empathy in maintaining worthwhile relationships. It is the emphasis that both these writers and Janet Frame herself place on empathy that motivates the changes she makes in her concept of the imagination, and which allows the possibility of 'immanence', glimpsed in the final phase of her writing to date. The final chapter of this thesis applies these phases and the conclusions drawn from Frame's novels to her autobiography, arguing that each volume of the autobiography represents one of those phases. I draw the conclusion that this is a conscious attempt by Frame to argue against the sometimes negative critical receptions of both her novels and particularly her personal decisions as a writer.

Abbreviations Used in this Thesis

The following abbreviations are used to denote the titles of each of Janet Frame's works; the bibliographical details can be found in the bibliography that follows this thesis.

<i>A</i>	<i>Janet Frame: An Autobiography</i> (This incorporates <i>To the Is-Land</i> , <i>An Angel at My Table</i> and <i>The Envoy from Mirror City</i> in one volume.)
<i>AM</i>	<i>The Adaptable Man</i>
<i>C</i>	<i>The Carpathians</i>
<i>DB</i>	<i>Daughter Buffalo</i>
<i>EA</i>	<i>The Edge of the Alphabet</i>
<i>FW</i>	<i>Faces in the Water</i>
<i>IC</i>	<i>Intensive Care</i>
<i>LM</i>	<i>Living in the Maniototo</i>
<i>ODC</i>	<i>Owls Do Cry</i>
<i>R</i>	<i>The Rainbirds</i>
<i>SGB</i>	<i>Scented Gardens for the Blind</i>
<i>SS</i>	<i>A State of Siege</i>

The following abbreviations are used to denote the major works of Immanuel Kant:

<i>CP</i>	<i>Critique of Pure Reason</i>
<i>CJ</i>	<i>Critique of Judgement</i>

Introduction

The most dominant feature of Janet Frame's fiction, noted time and again by critics,¹ is the importance she places on the imagination as a positive alternative to the materialism of modern society. Readers familiar with only the autobiography will also notice the importance that the young Frame places on 'having imagination' and the efforts she makes to seem 'imaginative'; in *To the Is-Land*, she describes her attempts to find a place and an identity for herself among the expectations of her family, school and community: 'My only escape was within myself, to "my place", within an imagination that I was not even sure I possessed, but where I hoped to avoid the praising, blaming scrutiny of others' (A 108). The role of the imagination as a 'place' in which to establish one's own identity and where it is possible to escape from the demands of everyday life is firmly established here, and it is a notion which is continually developed and reworked throughout Frame's fiction. Extended critical discussions of the imagination in Frame's work are notably lacking, however, with comments usually at best noting the positive attitude Frame shows towards the imagination without investigating completely the nature of the powers attributed to it, or even the extent of these powers. It is the intention of this thesis, therefore, to redress this gap in Frame criticism, and to posit a possible path of development for Frame's conception of the imagination.

In so doing I hope not only to cast new light on aspects of her work, but in tracing the development of Frame's ideas concerning the imagination, which I argue undergoes two main shifts, I hope to tentatively claim that Frame's work is able to be divided into three broad phases. These are:

- provincialism, with a bent towards Romanticism and modernism – a phase which extends from *Owls Do Cry* to *The Edge of the Alphabet*;
- a negative, apocalyptic version of postmodernism – a mood which dominates Frame's novels from *Scented Gardens for the Blind* to *Intensive Care*;
- a positive view of postmodernism which offers the possibility of the discovery of transcendental truth – the search for which dominates Frame's final three novels to date from *Daughter Buffalo* as well as the *Autobiography*.

These terms are, of course, continually open to debate, and in this introduction I will outline my own definitions of them. More important, however, is the need to maintain flexible definitions for these terms; it is not my intention to slot Frame rigidly into a pre-existing hole,

¹ Jones, for example, notes that in *Owls Do Cry* the 'childhood world of imagination . . . is the book's only positive value' (1998, p.161).

but the changes that I have noticed in her perception of the imagination make such divisions into phases not only inviting but helpful in discussing her oeuvre as a whole. Frame is much too difficult to pin down in such a rigid way, but I hope to reduce this tendency by relying on the notion of the postmodern, despite the fact that as a term it is just as slippery: '[a]ny attempt to formulate a positive sense of the postmodern in relation to post-Romantic aesthetics must proceed tentatively in an awareness that every position on Postmodernism is hedged about with its own dangers' (Waugh 3).

In focussing on Frame's conception of the imagination I have been frustrated by the lack of in depth discussion by other literary critics of what constitutes Frame's imagination. Most seem happy to conclude that Frame's novels argue for nothing more than perfect freedom for every person's imagination. Consequently, there is little attempt to 'make sense' of her novels in a more traditional sense, and many seem happy to interpret the novels as 'mosaics' which resist and in fact do not require, more traditional interpretation. I respect these views, and this is certainly in keeping with the majority of criticism which argues that on formal grounds, Frame's novels can generally be regarded as postmodernist. These arguments have been dealt with very competently by others, and it is not my intention to repeat them here.² My discussions of postmodernism generally in this thesis, however, refer to my frustration that once the arguments for relativism and subjectivity are made, there is little else that can be said about these novels.

relativism
subjectivity

In analysing more deeply Frame's ideas about the imagination, therefore, and I have made two basic assumptions. Firstly, I do discuss the novels along a moral continuum, as I believe that the emphasis Frame makes in her novels on the importance of empathy justifies this approach. Secondly, the characters are largely discussed as realistic characters, in spite of Frame's common assertion at the end of her novels that the protagonists are in fact the products of someone's imagination. I do this because when each reader experiences this text for the first time, that is generally how they regard the characters in the novel. I do not think that Frame's assertion of the unreality of her characters at the end of her novels undercuts her ideas about that character or makes them less real. Although shocking and disorienting for her readers, I suspect that this technique is more about Frame being reluctant to own her ideas as represented in the novel, rather than acting as an authorial comment on the invalidity of those ideas.

² See, for example, Simon During, 'Postmodernism or Postcolonialism', *Landfall* 39:3, 1985, 366-380; Suzette Henke, 'The Postmodern Frame', *ANZSC* 5, (1991) 29-38; Shona Smith, 'Fixed Salt Beings', *Untold* 5, 1986, 24-32.

The shift that I propose Frame makes from Romanticism to postmodernism may seem surprising, but a large number of critics, in recently divining a more positive conception of postmodernism than has been previously described, have made much of what is common to both periods. For Patricia Waugh, Romantic and postmodern thought are both modes 'which, in different ways, privilege art and give it a central place in the organisation of human experience' (Waugh 19). Rather than the usual understanding of postmodernism as 'breaking with' the assumptions of Romanticism and modernism, postmodernism should be seen 'as a logical culmination of the premises of these earlier movements' (Graff 219). Waugh agrees, defining postmodernism as 'a late phase in a tradition of specifically aestheticist modern thought inaugurated by philosophers such as Kant and embodied in Romantic *and* modernist art. In these terms, Postmodernism as an aesthetic body of thought can be seen as a late-flowering Romanticism' (Waugh 3). Postmodernism most closely resembles Romanticism in its valorisation of the imagination as an alternative to empirical knowledge, exemplified by scientific positivism in the nineteenth century and rationalised reason in ours.

The most important Romantic figure in this debate was the German Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant, who wrote three critiques showing the importance to the human mind of the imagination in gaining knowledge. The most significant of these critiques were his first, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, and his third, *The Critique of Judgement*. Kant has become increasingly important in recent years, as his theories fit well alongside the postmodern notions of subjective truths and the conspiracy surrounding scientific knowledge which, operating under the guise of reason, is seen to work to exclude certain experiences of those marginalised groups in society, whether they be racial, class or gender groups. In postmodernism, all truths, including supposedly universal and certain truths, become subjective and simply a product of those who have power; thus, 'universal' truths become demystified as the product of male, middle-class Europeans who have promulgated the acceptance of scientific reason as a means of maintaining the status quo. The postmodern reaction to these truths is that they have erased the richness and diversity of different 'truths', leaving our society a poor imitation of what it could be. Novitz, for example, raises the possibility that we have, indeed, lost something valuable by elevating the ideals of the Enlightenment:

Could it be that the romantics were correct; that science dehumanizes by quantifying; that it straitjackets our inquiries by looking for knowledge in only one place and by ignoring other fountainheads? . . . In the present century, we have been told by a number of voices that science claims for

Subjective
Truth
Conspiracy
Scientific
Knowledge

Ch 6
Universalism

itself an authority which it does not possess; that it arbitrarily sets the criteria of rationality in ways that suit itself and its practitioners.

(Novitz 2)

Such dehumanisation in the pursuit of power and the subsequent loss of richness and diversity are enacted vividly in the third part of *Intensive Care*. It is important to point out here that Frame is not totally against science or reason *per se*, but argues against it in much the same way as Wordsworth, whose 'lines are to be read only as his judgements against the fallacy of misplaced abstraction, and against the scientist whose laboratory habits are so indurate that he continues to analyze where only imagination and feeling are relevant' (Abrams 309).

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Janet Frame's debt to the English Romantic poets is apparent not only in the extent to which her novels are littered with quotations from their works, but also in her perception of the imagination as an alternative to the confusing demands of the 'real' world. The aim of this thesis is to trace the development of Frame's imagination throughout her writing career, arguing that her notion of the imagination gains increasing sophistication until the period of her last three novels to date – a period which also includes the three volumes of autobiography – when she is finally able to use the imagination to transcend the demands of the postmodern world. The acknowledgement of the powers of the imagination was originally proclaimed by the English Romantic poets, as Wordsworth, Coleridge and, in this example, Keats all proclaimed the powers of the imagination as 'a seeing, reconciling, combining force that seizes the old, penetrates beneath its surface, disengages the truth lying slumbering there, and, building afresh, bodies forth anew a reconstructed universe in fair forms of artistic power and beauty' (Hill 19). In the second volume of her *Autobiography*, Frame assures her reader in terms reminiscent of the Romantics that the 'most magical word to me was still Imagination, a glittering noble word, never failing to create its own inner light' (A 163). Frame goes on to quote at length Coleridge's famous exposition on the imagination in his *Biographia Literaria*, which she claims to have learned by heart. This passage is worth quoting in full, not only as it is clearly important to Frame, but because it forms the basis of all subsequent discussions of the imagination by philosophers and literary critics in the English literary tradition:

look up.

The Imagination then I consider either as primary or secondary. The primary Imagination I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I Am. The Secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in

degree and in the *mode* of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealise and to unify. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead . . . Fancy, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. The Fancy is indeed no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space; while it is blended with and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word Choice. But equally with the ordinary memory the Fancy must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association. Good sense is the body of poetic genius, Fancy its drapery, Motion its life, and Imagination the soul that is everywhere and in each; and forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole.

(A 163)

This long passage is best discussed by dealing with the three components in reverse. Fancy is the most limited faculty, as although it can cast new light on pieces of experience or memory, this is only done through the associative process and so can therefore form no coherent truth. As Jonathon Wordsworth explains, memory and experience can, through fancy, 'be formed into patterns, but the individual components, because they remain fixed and definite, can take on no life of their own, and form no vital bonds with their neighbours' (Wordsworth 491). The Secondary Imagination is more sophisticated, as it tends 'to idealize and to unify', which fancy is unable to do. It resembles the Primary Imagination because of this enlivening quality, and it is often difficult to distinguish between the two. On the other hand, this secondary imagination is a product, like fancy, of 'the conscious will', so that '[o]ne can be deliberately imaginative at this secondary level, just as one can be deliberately fanciful' (Wordsworth 491). For Coleridge, it is the Primary Imagination which is the most important, as it is through this faculty that we are able to repeat God's 'eternal act of creation'. This is a logical progression from realising oneself as 'I Am', as Coleridge explains at the end of Thesis IX: 'We begin with the I KNOW MYSELF, in order to end with the absolute I AM. We proceed from the SELF, in order to lose and find all self in God' (Wordsworth 492).

In developing his philosophy, Coleridge was greatly indebted to the German philosophers of the period, particularly Immanuel Kant, to the extent that questions have arisen concerning Coleridge's suspected plagiarism of his work (Ashton 498). The influence of Kant on Coleridge is particularly noticeable in the notion of the imagination acting as a synthesising power, described in Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*. Frame's personal vision has more in common with Immanuel Kant, the German Enlightenment philosopher, than with the Romantic poets who, except for their attempts to distinguish between imagination and fancy, make little effort to argue for the universal quality of their knowledge. They recognise that

their claims for transcendent truth are ultimately only of personal value (Ball 64). In his three Critiques, however, Kant argued for the importance of the imagination in achieving knowledge, yet he later moved to modify the extent of his claims by arguing for the need to exercise proper judgement, which would reduce the tendency for highly varying viewpoints to collapse into solipsism, and render possible truths also relevant for others. It is highly probable that Frame read Kant, perhaps discovering his work through the Romantics, as some of the terms Kant uses appear in Frame's work, particularly that of the 'manifold', and her attempts to forge a middle ground for herself between objectivity and subjectivity are reminiscent of Kant's own working through of this problem.

W2
Kant's most strident claims for the power of the imagination are found in his first Critique, the *Critique of Pure Reason*. He claims that the imagination is 'one of the fundamental faculties of the human soul' (CP 101), and the basis on which all knowledge depends, as it is the mysterious power that is capable of transforming our sensible perceptions into apperception, or understanding. This is achieved by the gathering of representations, which are images of how we 'are affected by objects' (CP 15) and receiving them into the manifold, which is the collection of these representations. According to Kant, it is the imagination which is capable of spontaneously synthesising what is contained in the manifold by 'arranging different representations together and . . . comprehending what is manifold in them under one form of knowledge' (CP 64). This arrangement and collection is achieved by a three-stage process of apprehension, reproduction and recognition, whereby the imagination is able to compare and contrast each representation in the manifold and recognise which of those representations are largely the same and can be arranged under the umbrella of one common representation of that idea or object. It is important to recognise these reproductions as such, so that our thinking can progress, otherwise we would never move beyond the same point in our thinking. With no sense of linear time, this would be impossible, 'for as contained in one moment, each representation can never be anything but absolute unity' (CP 82). It is the unity of the synthesis that results in understanding, although Kant points out that while it was the function of the understanding to form judgements of the representations which make up the manifold, this judgement cannot be regarded as law or some other nondebateable principle, but only as 'a mediate knowledge of an object, or a representation of a representation of it' (CP 56). The appeal for postmodernists of statements such as these is obvious: we can never really know anything, so any claim to knowledge is justified, as it cannot be proved incorrect. The problem with the subjective nature of knowledge is that it can easily fall into hopeless relativism or solipsism, or what Coleridge called 'Fancy', and I

suspect that Kant's awareness of the potential for this is what led him to write his Third Critique, in which he noticeably adds limits to the freedom of the imagination.

Kant's *Critique of Judgement* is concerned with aesthetics, and is claimed by postmodernists such as Lyotard to champion the role of the imagination at the expense of theory or determining principles, thereby 'curing' Kant of his own rationalism by discovering the imagination and 'the faculty of desire' (Lucy 174). I think that Lyotard is mistaken, as there are no sweeping statements claiming the importance of the imagination in this Third Critique, and although Kant does attribute desire as a motivating factor, most of the work is concerned with what he calls 'reflective judgement', which functions as a curbing influence on the imagination, and is therefore a means of preventing meaningless relativism, which is a constant danger for postmodernists. Kant defines the ideal work of art as having two elements: the aesthetical idea, which comes from individual intuition, and the rational idea, which he defines as revealing 'the purposes of humanity' (CJ 70). These come from what Kant calls 'maxims of common human understanding'. These are the capacity:

- (1) to think for oneself, which is the maxim of *unprejudiced* thought;
- (2) to put ourselves in thought in the place of everyone else, which is the maxim of *enlarged* thought;
- (3) always to think consistently, which is the maxim of *consecutive* thought.

Alternatively, these maxims can be known as the maxim of understanding, of judgement, and of reason. As such, the third maxim is the least important when discussing postmodern literature, due to the postmodern suspicion of reason. The first two maxims, however, are directly relevant to Frame's work, and an exploration of them is necessary in order to understand its underlying principles.

Kant showed in his First Critique the importance of the imagination in achieving knowledge by creating a single representation made up of various representations contained in the manifold, and this function is equally important in works of art, as the imagination is 'very powerful in creating another nature, as it were, out of the material that actual nature gives it. We entertain ourselves with it when experience becomes too commonplace, and by it we remould experience . . . so that the material supplied to us by nature in accordance with this law can be worked up into something different which surpasses nature' (CJ 157). A work of art is the one time, according to Kant, that the imagination is not subject to the constraint of the understanding, because it is free to create new material from the old which the understanding, ignoring the rational concept behind the artwork, 'applies, though not objectively for cognition, yet subjectively to quicken the cognitive powers and therefore also

indirectly to cognitions' (CJ 160). Thus, art is capable of extending the understanding, as the arrangement of the material stimulates not only the reader's imagination, but also their cognitive, or rationalising powers. The importance of stimulation means, therefore, that art is allowed to be subjective: according to Kant it must appeal to our individual senses before any kind of objective understanding of the meaning of the work can be achieved. The difficulty lies in making it *universally communicable*, which 'requires a faculty of seizing the quickly passing play of imagination and of unifying it in a concept . . . that can be communicated without any constraint' (CJ 161). What is required is a means of communicating not only the concept but also the necessary play of the imagination that is involved in achieving understanding. This is rather vague, and apart from defining this communicability as 'spirit' Kant says little else on how it is to be achieved. His use of 'faculty' here obscures his meaning, I think. What Kant is suggesting is what Frame in fact does; Kant suggests the use of images or, to use his vocabulary, *representations* which stimulate the imagination into a spontaneous understanding of the given concept. My evidence for suggesting this is Kant's discussion of poetry, in which he defines the poetic imagination at work as essentially creative, since although it is concerned with promoting understanding, 'it brings the faculty of intellectual ideas, (the reason) into movement; ie. by a representation more thought (which indeed belongs to the concept of the object) is occasioned than can in it be grasped or made clear' (CJ 158). These representations stimulate the imagination into a spontaneous understanding of the given concept, without the rational part of the brain necessarily having to work through beforehand the entire reasoning behind it.

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The notion of using representations to communicate ideas is an important one, as I think it reinforces many of Frame's own ideas about the imagination and her inability to communicate her ideas in a way that encompasses the underlying thoughts behind them. Frame is attracted to images as a means of communicating her ideas. Indeed, her novels progress not through plot or characterisation, but through the patterning of recurring images through her text. Frame's reliance on images rather than narrative reflects her distrust of the power of language to communicate her ideas in totality. For her, language is divisive: an instrument of reason, it has been cheapened and misused so that words which previously had a whole raft of connotations and feelings attached to them have been reduced to mere black figures on a white page – an instrument of 'talking' and 'speech' rather than communicating one's innermost feelings.

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The use of these images is controlled, however, by the reflective judgement, which curbs the imagination in its requirement that art must have purpose. This is the necessity of the second

maxim, that of enlarged thought, and it why it is called the maxim of judgement. Being able to put oneself in the place of others instils art with purpose, as it presents not only our common humanity, but champions the necessity of considering others rather than simply oneself. In my view, over the period of writing her eleven novels, Frame has moved from a narrow preoccupation with the importance of the imagination towards a wider focus on the imagination's power to enable better judgement and improved social interaction. This trajectory incorporates Kant's maxim of enlarged thinking, and operates in a dialectical relationship with the other legacies of Kantian thought, which have been developed by philosophers such as Nietzsche and Heidegger so that the aesthetic is 'finally seen as so inseparable from world or knowledge that no distinction remains between truth and fiction' (Waugh 15). This conception of the aesthetic opens up space for private worlds and private conceptions of the self, so that the aesthetic becomes in postmodernism 'both an X epistemology and an ontology' (Waugh 15). The movement in Frame's writing towards a more postmodern conception of the imagination also involves a movement towards an acceptance of the postmodern self, as she and her characters negotiate the dialectic that operates between the urge for an authentic self, discovered through the private world of one's imagination, and the urge for greater consideration of others, which implies a new kind of humanism, and can act as a curbing influence on individual freedom of action and expression.

In moving from a romanticised view of the imagination as something which gives visionary insight towards a view of the imagination incorporating Kant's emphasis on the importance of enlarged thinking, Frame investigates fully the consequences of having certain types of imagination. Her visionary characters are ostracised from society and forced to change their behaviour and give up their insight. Later, in her 'apocalyptic phase', Frame describes characters who have no capacity for enlarged thinking – or empathy – and she warns of the danger of this kind of narcissistic fantasy. The narcissist is unable to feel any kind of empathy, and as such acts as the opposite of the imaginative individual – although this thesis will show that many of Frame's most imaginative and visionary characters are in fact narcissistic. In discussing narcissism, I will use the writings of the psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut who argues in terms very similar to Kant's that the narcissist can learn more appropriate action through 'introspection and empathy' (Kohut, 'On Empathy' 529). Kohut's theories on narcissism will be explained fully in the first chapter.

Frame's developing awareness of the potential of the imagination can be seen when her eleven novels are viewed in the three provisional phases I outlined above, and these will be

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dealt with in the three separate chapters of this thesis. I will argue in Chapter One that the three novels of the first phase have strong Romantic undertones through the depiction of 'mad' characters as visionaries protesting at the materialism and lack of spirituality in society. The strong polarisation between imagination and reason that occurs in these texts is paradigmatic of the Romantic period, but as with the Romantics the limitations of these novels is that they threaten to fall into fantasy – or, where the protest at modern society is deserved, they become simply another text in the provincial phase of New Zealand literature. The individuals in these novels value their individuality, and see the protection of the authentic self as much more important than 'the greater good', which is viewed with hostility.

Scented Gardens for the Blind marks a significant change in both Frame's writing style and her concerns, and marks the beginning of Frame's postmodernism. Important literary theorists such as Ihab Hassan, Susan Sontag and Gerald Graff identify two strains of postmodernism: one which is negative, and tends towards apocalypticism, and another which is liberated and tends towards transcendence. The latter trend is relatively new in literary and cultural circles, but it has caused many important theorists to revise their earlier definitions of postmodernism as simply negative resistance to previous tradition. Ihab Hassan, for example, admits that

[w]e cannot simply rest – as I sometimes have done – on the assumption that postmodernism is antiformal, anarchic, or decreative; for though it is all of these, it also contains the need to discover a 'unitary sensibility' (Sontag), to 'cross the border and close the gap' (Fiedler), and to attain . . . a neo-gnostic immediacy of mind.

(Hassan 89)

Many writers now go to great pains to distinguish between these two very different trends within postmodernism; Graff, for example, calls the two poles of postmodernism the 'apocalyptic' and the 'visionary' (218), while Bertens defines the more negative strain as one 'that has given up referentiality and meaning' while the other, more positive movement within postmodernism 'still seeks to be referential and sometimes even tries to establish local, temporary, and provisional truths' (47-8). These theories all have much in common, particularly the acknowledgement that both poles often work together at the same time, so that it is commonly acknowledged that '[a]lthough postmodern apocalypticism is primarily thought of as expressing absolute fragmentariness . . . it is, if covertly, as much concerned with reconciliation and reintegration as it is with their impossibility' (Waugh 14). Acknowledging this two-way movement helps, I think, to place Frame's writing, as although it features the destabilising techniques and skepticism about language that characterise

'apocalyptic' postmodernism, Frame's nostalgia for the notion of 'truth', along with her apocalyptic characterisations of the modern world, have left readers with a strong sense of modernism and/or Romanticism. It is the legacies of these movements that provide the foundations for the visionary form of the postmodern which emerges later in Frame's writing.

In the second period of Frame's writing, therefore, I define her novels as postmodern with a strong tendency towards the apocalyptic strain of postmodernism. This strain runs through her novels from *Scented Gardens for the Blind* up to and including *Intensive Care*, where the endings of her novels feature either nuclear blasts and imagery reminiscent of the holocaust, or the dramatic endings of the lives of individuals unable to cope with life in the postmodern world. In this phase Frame escapes the provincialism of her earlier novels through a wider concern for humanity at large, and with the characteristically postmodern interrogation of language as an inadequate means for communication. There is a positive element in these novels, and it is provided by the imagination, which undergoes a change similar to Kant's maxim of enlarged thought, as Frame shows the possession of imagination to be necessary for understanding and empathising with others. This notion of the importance of the imagination for greater understanding between others is strongest in those of her novels which feature the threat of nuclear devastation, since the latter is seen as the logical outcome, in the due course of history, of the failure of imagination and empathy among individuals. Frame's pessimism at the obstacles which stand in the way of this ideal of communication, however, dominates these novels, leaving them with a strong sense of doom. The other novels in this phase also reinforce this negativity; they are concerned with the place of individuals in a world where communication is impossible, and with the impossibility of solidarity between people if it requires the sacrifice of the authentic self. In Chapter Two I will discuss *A State of Siege* as representative of this phase, since it epitomises the struggle that Frame's characters face in endeavouring to find their 'selves' at the expense of severing their relationships with others.

The third and final phase of Frame's writing to date offers an attempt to resolve these conflicting impulses, through the discovery of the postmodern form of transcendence – which Hassan calls 'immanence'. Hassan terms the opposing, apocalyptic pole of postmodernism 'indeterminacy', but concedes that these two poles often function simultaneously, or interplay with each other. Indeterminacy is defined as the 'will to unmaking' which affects 'the body politic, the body cognitive, the erotic body, the individual psyche – the entire realm of discourse in the West' (92). Difficult to describe, it

Review
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Q. in 1981
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Review

incorporates those diverse aspects of metafiction that we have come to associate with postmodern fiction:

ambiguity, discontinuity, heterodoxy, pluralism, randomness, revolt, perversion, deformation. The latter alone subsumes a dozen current terms of unmaking: decreation, disintegration, deconstruction, decentrement, displacement, difference, discontinuity, disjunction, disappearance, decomposition, de-definition, demystification, detotalization, delegitimization – let alone more technical terms referring to the rhetoric of irony, rupture, silence.

(92)

Frame had already begun to use these techniques in the second phase of her writing, but in her last three novels they become more obvious, and consequently much more distressing to her readers. The narrative and metafictional techniques of *Daughter Buffalo*, *Living in the Maniototo* and *The Carpathians* leave the reader feeling even more disoriented than her earlier novels, as they find themselves going round in circles, unable to pin Frame down on any point of 'reality' in these novels. These techniques act to destabilise our conceptions of 'reality', our 'selves' and every truth that we take for granted, leaving a space wide open so that indeterminacy pushes far enough through to emerge as immanence. Hassan suggests that 'indeterminacy surely need not deny an ideal of harmonious perfection; nor is strangeness sometimes but the action of an immanent future in our lives' (47-8), and claims that the only possible means of discovering one's own personal state of near-transcendence or immanence is to clear a space in which this can happen. This space he calls silence, claiming that

[a]t the far limit of indeterminacy, however, the figurative state of silence . . . reigns. Silence as "experiment" in literature, its urge to question and contest itself; and it moves through self-parody and self-subversion, radical irony, to the edges of speech [sic]. There, on the dark margins of consciousness, literature wants to consume or transcend itself wholly – in vain. And precisely there, on the margins of silence, the dream of immanence teases literature, teases all art, back into waking.

(75-6)

Immanence is not transcendence – that is something impossible in the postmodern world – but it is a state of personal readiness for transcendence, which is the best that we can hope for. Hassan describes immanence as

a term that I employ without religious echo to designate the capacity of mind to generalize itself in symbols, intervene more and more into nature, act upon itself through its own abstractions and so become, increasingly, im-me-diatly, its own environment. This noetic tendency may be evoked further by such sundry concepts as diffusion, dissemination, pulsion, interplay, communication, interdependence, which all derive from the emergence of human beings as language animals, homo pictor or homo significans, gnostic creatures constituting

themselves, and determinedly their universe, by symbols of their own making.

(“Towards a Concept of Postmodernism” 93)

In Frame’s final three novels, each of her characters adopts a symbol of their own which not only symbolises those things that are important to them – imagination, feeling and language – but also acts as a catalyst for their creating of themselves, as it comes to symbolise their own ‘selves’. This act continues the debt to the Romantics, as in resolving the conflicts of self and world of the earlier novels through the acceptance and projection of self as both subject and object, it resembles the Romantics’ uncovering of ‘the ways man and nature are unified’ (Altieri 608). Hassan constructs the neologism ‘indetermanence’ [‘indeterminacy’ and ‘immanence’] to show how the two tendencies of postmodernism work together to ‘trace both centre and circumference in our culture, how they continually play between self-reflexiveness and self-surrender’ (80) to resolve the conflict between self and world.

My final chapter will outline the implications of this reading of Frame’s work in three phases for a reading of the autobiography, arguing that it can be seen as a summary of Frame’s vision. This is in view of the fact that there are two shifts in Frame’s perspective that she describes in the autobiography, the first occurring in *To the Is-land* with her realisation that literature alone can not be an adequate source of knowledge of the human condition, as it sometimes is only able to offer solace rather than facts. The second occurs in *An Angel at My Table*, when she realises the value of continually widening one’s experience, and the third in *The Envoy from Mirror City*, where she offers a vision of the transcendent imagination in the guise of the two elements to which the title refers.

CHAPTER ONE:

The Visionary, the Narcissist, and Frame's Romanticised Imagination

From her first novel, Frame emphasises the importance of the imagination by claiming that those who live predominantly within the world of the imagination are 'visionaries', who alone are able to diagnose the ills of provincial New Zealand society. This view is most stridently expressed in *Owls Do Cry*, and indeed the character of Daphne Withers epitomises the struggle of the alienated individual against the rest of society in our literature. Paradoxically, however, it is the force with which Frame argues for Daphne's status as 'seer' which limits this novel to a mere critique of New Zealand society. Daphne's function as a visionary limits her ability to perform more simply as a *character* in the novel, preventing reader-identification with her and the acceptance of her 'message', which becomes almost impossible to separate from Frame's own in this first novel. Frame herself probably realised these limitations, inventing new Daphne-figures in the later novels of the 'Withers trilogy' in the forms of Istina Mavet and Thora Pattern (Evans, *Janet Frame* 80). These later characters/narrators are developed in alternate ways, giving up the 'visionary' role in order to become more like conventional characters or, in the case of Thora Pattern, to assume the privileged position of narrator/creator. These later attempts to insist on the powers of the imagination by showing the world through the eyes of an imaginative character are more successful, due to Frame's increasing ability to delineate the inner worlds of her characters.

The limited sense both readers and the characters of *Owls Do Cry* gain of Daphne's inner world is the very reason that she, of Frame's early heroines, is the least successful in convincing others of the benefits of cultivating one's imagination. Obviously, Daphne's enforced lobotomy renders her a permanent victim, but the extent of Daphne's private vision is undercut in various ways. Although the reader has access to Daphne's thoughts in the form of the poetry which introduces the novel and also acts as an organising principle within it, closing and opening various sections, the reader gains little sense of how her private world is constructed. Natural images dominate her thoughts and poetry which, coupled with the importance she places on her own and the other Withers children's childhood, are reminiscent of the Romantic poets. Unlike these poets, however, there is none of the reconciliation between the self and the empirical world that occurs in Romantic poetry.

poetry
Daphne's

Both the philosophy of Frame's novel and Daphne's vision move forward through a series of oppositions, which exist under the umbrella opposition of the imagination and society. Frame later adopted the more traditional stance (discussed in the Introduction) of opposing the imagination with reason, but in her early novels the place of reason is assumed by the values of society. The main oppositions established in *Owls Do Cry* are between the opposing value-systems of childhood and adulthood, namely, fantasy versus materialism and the kind of 'knowing' that Francie is taught in school, and between the imaginative world of the rubbish dump which offers freedom versus the rational world of the mental hospital, where freedom has been removed and the world of routine conquers. Is the world of the rubbish dump offered in Daphne's vision, however, a viable alternative to the real world? In short, the answer is no, it does not, as it is unable to produce a synthesis of the opposing values of adulthood and childhood, and therefore remains simply in opposition to the external world. Although the rubbish dump is perceived in images which show its potential to allow the children freedom, this fluidity does not last. In the extended description offered of the dump at the beginning of the novel, the tip is depicted as a protective 'shell' for the children, who are able to recover from the demands of the adult world through the healing power of nature. The natural harmony that results from the ordinary decay of the fir tree dropping its needles offers a healing, 'stitching' power to the wounds that the children develop as they struggle against the adult world. This shelter offers up fairytales, which provide the children with an alternative way of seeing and this, Frame insists, is the most natural, healthy way of seeing:

The place was like a shell with a golden tickle of toi-toi around its edges and grass and weeds growing in green fur over the mounds of rubbish; and from where the children sat, snuggled in the hollow of refuse, warmed sometimes by the trickling streams of fires that the council men had lit in order to hasten the death of their material cast-offs, they could see the sky passing in blue or grey ripples, and hear in the wind, the heavy fir tree that leaned over the hollow, rocking, talking to itself saying firr-firr-firr, its own name, loosening its needles of rust that slid into the yellow and green burning shell to prick tiny stitches across the living and lived-in wound where the children found, first and happiest, fairy tales.

(3)

This healing power of the dump is shortlived, however, and now the dump only serves as a reminder of the values that have been given up, personified in the figure of Toby who returns again and again as an adult to the tip, which is now a wound which 'never heals but festers always', according to Chicks (101). But at least Toby remembers. The townspeople's ultimate betrayal of their past fantasies is to build houses over it, and Chicks shares in this betrayal of her childhood and of Daphne by moving to a house on top of the old tip. This

move prefigures Daphne's lobotomy in the same way that Francie's death does earlier. Such 'progress' is also a travesty of the natural cycle which is highlighted in the description of the dump. The building of houses offers the dump a new lease of life as something transformed, but its rebirth is very different to the natural one recounted earlier. Rather than offering something imaginative that can bring transformation through the individual, the dump is transformed in a highly unimaginative way that precludes touches of individuality: into typical suburban houses which, with every modern appliance, exclude the possibility of dream. The removal of the rubbish dump is not the only cause of the loss of the natural order. If the imagination is associated with positive natural imagery, the pervasiveness of negative natural imagery throughout the novel signals the removal of Daphne's imagination by force.

As Jones points out, images of 'winter, cold, darkness, erosion, knitting, the sea, the eel [and] the dead hedgehog' dominate the novel (Jones *Oxford History* 177), and their unrelenting presence is due to a lack of the kind of vision which is able to properly accommodate this death imagery as part of nature's cycle. Apart from the first description of the rubbish dump, little mention is made of the healing power of nature through its cyclical quality - it seems that Frame-as-Daphne was not quite ready to admit the healing power of the nature cycle. It is not until *Daughter Buffalo* that Frame carefully outlines the redemptive power of nature when coming to terms with both Time and Death.

A major problem with the novel is that it is Daphne who yearns to return to the world of her childhood, yet she alone is the member of the Withers family who stands out as never really having had a childhood. From the reader's first encounter with her, Daphne has a wisdom which reaches far beyond her years, and it is difficult to reconcile this 'child' with the paradise of childhood that is maintained as an ideal throughout the novel. While Francie struggles with the demands of working in the adult world, Daphne is able to diagnose the heart of the problem: '[a]nd Daphne thought, one time when she peeped through the hedge at Francie going, If only she had some kind of treasure with her, inside, to help her; if only grown-ups could tell what is treasure and not treasure' (28). Daphne is already able to grasp the full implications of growing up, a fate symbolised by the dread of working at the mill, and she alone perceives the drive of society to break the personalities of individuals in order to force them to conform. Society's slogans are designed to imprison individuals and to force them to become what society has decreed its ideal citizens should be. These ideal inhabitants refuse to think for themselves, accepting the decrees and 'norms' of 'society' and they continually adapt themselves to fit in with the rest of the crowd. The result of this constant lack of loyalty to oneself, however, is an inner shallowness born out of habit and

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Whole of

ch 3

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convenience, and an inability to question and to discover the truths of life. Society wants its members to be as clueless as the vacuous female that the EST machine physically resembles – curved, with luminous eyes ready for instant gratification (39). For provincial New Zealand society of the 1950s, this gratification is provided by material goods. Toby becomes a victim of this desire for material things, regarding money as treasure. He succumbs to the prevailing tide of public opinion in his desire to 'fit in', a desire which shows clearly his pain and loneliness at an inability to create his own world which would render unimportant the opinions of society:

Toby closed his eyes and opened them again, quickly, in case the world changed suddenly and there were some corner to hide in, belonging. Oh marry Fay Chalklin and not ever be on the outside of the circle that whirled round and round faster than any light and letting no part break for a man to squeeze in and be warm, my God, an epileptic too.

(54)

Interestingly, society is just as adept at excluding those deemed too 'odd' as it is at 'fixing' people into rigid pigeonholes like Daphne and Francie.

Our society is afraid of those who can think for themselves, particularly the 'mad' who Frame depicts in her novels as the visionaries of society, who can see through the facades of social decorum and expectation. The mental hospital functions as the extreme right arm of a society determined to keep its members under control, and its most effective means of ensuring this is to label behaviour that threatens the ideals of society as punishable. In *Faces in the Water*, Istina is so sensitive to this judicial power of the hospital that she phrases her awareness in terms of the committing of a criminal act: 'I would have to be careful. I would have to wear gloves, to leave no trace when I burgled the crammed house of feeling and took for my own exuberance depression suspicion terror' (16). The patients' susceptibility to feeling is also condemned by the 'outside' world, as it refuses to accommodate those who need love, compassion and encouragement. Istina points out that for many patients 'the streamlined insanity of their behaviour was the product, in the beginning, of crude longing dug out from their heart' (103).

In *Owls Do Cry* the emphasis is less on shock treatment as a means of control than on showing it as a way of blinding the insight of these patients which threatens the foundations of society, and returning them to 'normal':

O, but at nine o'clock, it is said, all will be well. Their seeing will be blinded, the shade replaced across their eyes to restrict their looking to their plate, their tea, their cigarette; in practice for the world; stopped like a house to look forever on its backyard

(37)

In Frame's novels the 'mad' have access to the truth in ways that the 'normal' do not: '*And the grey crater of the long-dead mad lies empty enough to be filled with many truths altogether*' (131). Importantly, there is not just one truth here, but each patient has their own truths which exist alongside the truths of others, with no claims made for greater validity than any other. In this novel, however, Daphne's vision is granted greater claims to truth than any other, and so Frame can be regarded as becoming guilty of the same kind of intolerance of others' values that she protests against. She roundly condemns not only those who do not possess imagination, but those who possess the wrong kind of imagination. These characters are meant to be regarded as victims of a society that values empty, meaningless clichés rather than imagination, but their fates are so dire that it is difficult to believe that Frame is not also exercising her own judgement on them. Although Francie is clearly a victim, she is also burned at the dump in return for rejecting the values of childhood play and adopting the clichéd poses of romantic love:

— Goodbye. Daphne sang out after her.

— Goodbye, Francie said.

And she added, in the same voice that women in films use when they dismiss their lovers for the last time,

— Goodbye, *schoolgirl*.

(25)

Frame also judges harshly those who are well aware that tendencies to disbelieve and devalue the imagination are so powerful that those who do have imagination can only survive by keeping it hidden. Flora Norris, Daphne's nurse, has her own secret dreams, but she knows that they must be kept secret to ensure her survival in society, as to reveal them would reveal her to be as imaginative as her patients. Keeping her dreams inside, however, causes damage to her self that is of a different kind – her appearance alters and becomes harsher, so that Flora stands with 'her hands clasped behind her back, her face cut through with the wire from the dream nasturtium, her lips pressed close to imprison the hallucinatory kiss of thirty years ago' (128). Flora's dream loses its reality, and becomes hallucinatory because it is not shared and thereby brought to life. Daphne can see Flora's dream, and she can see the pain caused by keeping her dream secret. Stepping forward, Daphne moves to

free Flora's dream and in so doing, to share it: 'then Daphne moved and slapped the face of Flora Norris, digging her hands in the barbed wire, yet feeling for one instant the velvet and warmth of the dream nasturtium' (129). Daphne is rejected, however, just as Istina is rejected by Sister Bridge in *Faces in the Water* when she attempts to establish an emotional bond with her, thereby easing the nurse's loneliness. These nurses' ability to conceal their true feelings and their affinities with their patients, as well as their vindictive carrying through of medical procedures for their own ends, nullify any attempts they make to distinguish between 'truth' and falsehood. Flora urges Daphne to talk to the doctor, but she can have no authority over Daphne because of her denial of her own truth. Daphne is able to see past this hypocrisy – the choosing of one truth over another – and decides that the nurses and doctors, and with them all voices who claim authority, 'are mad':

They are frauds, for the real how and where and who and why are in the circle of toi-toi, with the beautiful ledger writing and the book thrown away that told of Tom Thumb sitting in the horse's ear; and the sun shining through the sacrificial fire, to make real diamonds and gold.

Ab3

(ODC 128)

Daphne and Istina, along with Zoe and Toby in *The Edge of the Alphabet*, reject society's false truths, its false claims to authority, and its false treasure. Daphne favours the truths of her childhood, discovered in the fairytales and other treasure found at the dump, while Istina favours the truths she discovers in her experiences in mental institutions. Their common feature is that they are truths which reside in the world of the imagination, but in these early novels the imaginative powers of Frame's characters are limited. Although Frame is clearly making the point that the imaginations of her characters are limited by the society in which they live, their imaginativeness, in turn, is of a limited kind: their vision is used to critique the society in which they live rather than showing her readers the kind of society in which they could live. As Heather Roberts has pointed out, 'Istina's world consists more of a negation of a world that will not accept her than of the creation of a world of her own' (Roberts 132), and the same could be said for Daphne. Their idiosyncratic view is clear enough, but it flourishes from the society which it critiques rather than being completely spontaneous and individual. Daphne's clear vision at the hospital Christmas party, for example, stems from her ability to see through the facade of Christmas and the consumer paradise that accompanies it, rather than her own vision of what Christmas may mean for her: 'And seeing that the red and white God is no God, nor is there any gift nor any Christmas, Daphne begins to cry, softly, and throws her opened box of soap at the cottonwool God' (133). Daphne's tears and her pathetic gesture of throwing her gift back at Santa are gestures of rebellion and rejection of the values

ph3

of the outside world, but they are not carried through to any real, meaningful action. Although she identifies her need for 'something different', she is unable to articulate what that something is, and is rendered passive by an imagination which will not go far enough in its rejection of society and form a complete inner world:

Daphne stands wondering and ashamed, half-turning to go back to her seat in the corner, yet not wanting to, her other hand still held out for the present, not pants or petticoat with blue ribbons or talcum powder or face-cloth that the others have been given; nor the mauve and wavy-with-flowers box of lavender soap, four cakes in stiff twist cellophane, which she holds in her hand, but something different, she cannot fully tell its name or shape or size but she wants it, needs it, and waits for Santa, the red and white God standing in the middle of the room in front of the angel and the tree, to understand her need.

(132-3)

Daphne waits for someone else to understand her need. Unable to communicate in an authentic way that can be understood, she has retreated into a world of silence. Her passivity is shared by Istina's experiences in Treecroft and Cliffhaven; although initially assertive, 'becoming adept at making a fuss, at arguing and trying to stand up for my rights and the rights of the other patients whom I felt the responsibility of protecting' (94), gradually Istina is broken by the unkindness and authoritarianism of the hospital regime: '[i]n the end I did not seem to care; and if I wanted to go to the lavatory from the special table, and I was often wanting to go, and I was refused permission, I would slide from my seat under the table and wet on the floor like an animal' (95). In these early novels, it seems that passivity and withdrawal must go hand in hand with the visionary qualities which Frame values so highly. Daphne's value seems to lie in her sensitivity, as although her reactions to the deaths of both Francie and particularly Amy seem inappropriate and even callous to the nurse who watches Daphne dancing at the news of her mother's death, Daphne in fact touchingly acknowledges her own and her mother's matching heartbeats, and their matching deaths (144). Daphne's poetry is lyrical and visionary, but its main attribute is its sensitivity to the natural world and the contamination of the natural by society. She is a Romantic figure, her sense of alienation from the society in which she lives a twentieth-century version of the Romantic problem of 'dejection' (Chavkin 137). The value she places on childhood is reminiscent of the Wordsworthian conception of childhood, which for him 'represents the time of organic harmony with nature, and much value is placed on memory, which enables the poet to gain a meaningful insight into the past and its relation to the present' (Chavkin 138). The imagery in Daphne's poetry is predominantly natural, resembling the imagination of the Romantic poets, particularly Wordsworth, which 'is anchored in the world of the senses, and while it colours, modifies, and interprets reality by projecting feelings and ideas on the external world, it does

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not transcend everyday existence' (Chavkin 138). Daphne fits into the commonly understood definition of Romantic poets, therefore, who are 'sensitive' to nature and to feeling, but this simplistic understanding of the term 'Romantic' denies the higher form of Romanticism. The principle on which Romantic poetry rests is not, in fact, self-expression but 'self-exploration and discovery' (Ball 64). *Review*

Frame's depictions of differing individual views, opposed to the dominant values of the society in which they live, are not enough to give her work any sense of Romantic transcendence; her assertion of the importance of the idiosyncratic view of the person alienated from society fits comfortably into the modernist tradition and, in New Zealand, the provincial phase of writing. To escape from such a provincial label, Frame had yet to give her characters the kinds of imagination able to produce art that would be 'creations of an imagination willing to admit mystery in the notion of an experiencing mind, and convinced that by exploring this mystery some criteria for evaluating what is experienced can be found' (Ball 65). The possession of imagination is not enough to grant one's opinions and judgements infallible value, as it is only a thorough investigation of the mysteries of experience that enables anyone to evaluate the worth of those experiences. Frame seems to have realised that what her first novel lacked was a wider variety of experience, the inclusion of which would lessen the moral power of her characters and give her novels a greater claim to wisdom, and avoid the problem that Stevens identifies with *Owls Do Cry*:

[Daphne] is to see and feel for all of us as the story goes its way. Daphne thus expresses explicitly, in a poetic monologue, what *Owls Do Cry* means symbolically; she is also a character within the story; she is also very obviously the voice of the author. This is too great a burden to place upon any device or character or plot, and the novel suffers accordingly. *poetic monologue*

(Stevens 100)

The problem is that the treatment of Daphne is too subjective, and that her appropriateness as a visionary is hampered by the emotional investment that both the author and the reader make in her. Frame later seems to have realised that Romantic wisdom 'begins from a perception of the essential marriage between objective and subjective, not merely in the relationship of the world and the observer, but in the effort of self-realization to which the [art] is committed and by which it is most stimulated' (Ball 64). Daphne's poetry does not have the essential interchange between subjective and objective states; her vision is presented as infallible wisdom which is born of the wisdom of childhood, before one is corrupted by the false values of society. In this her vision resembles the first half of Wordsworth's 'Ode on the Intimations *Review Ch 3*

of Immortality', which mourned the loss of the vision resulting from childhood. It is in her second novel, however, that Frame creates a character who is able to reach the same kind of conclusion that Wordsworth makes in the second half of his poem, where he realises that although the loss of childhood is irreplaceable, his experiences have given him the kind of vision the loss of which he mourns. I argue that both Janet Frame and Istina Mavet, through the writing of *Faces in the Water*, come to an acceptance of their traumatic experiences, and are able to shape them into something coherent and meaningful which offers insight for readers. This novel is helped by the changes that Istina undergoes throughout the novel. Far less static than Daphne, Istina is a character with and through whom readers are able to learn as she moves toward the achievement of a sympathetic imagination.

Faces in the Water 'undoes' many of the Romantic assumptions of madness that proliferate literature, including Frame's first novel. Here, Frame is concerned with repudiating the notion of 'the easy Opheliana recited like the pages of a seed catalogue or the outpourings of Crazy Janes who provide, in fiction, an outlet for poetic abandon' (112). Although Frame claims to have tempered her descriptions of life in mental institutions in New Zealand so that their authenticity would not be questioned, she is faithful in her descriptions of the patients, openly admitting that

[f]ew of the people who roamed the dayroom would have qualified as acceptable heroines, in popular taste; few were charmingly inhibited eccentrics. The mass provoked mostly irritation hostility and impatience. Their behaviour affronted, caused uneasiness; they wept and moaned; they quarreled and complained. They were a nuisance and were treated as such. It was forgotten that they too possessed a prized humanity which need care and love, that a tiny poetic essence could be distilled from their overflowing squalid truth.

(112)

Looking back from her narrative position in the future, Istina is able to describe her own journey towards self-knowledge as she travels through the various wards of the two hospitals in which she was a patient. Frame is concerned in this novel 'with the inner person and with that which determines and defines humanness' (Panny 37), and she illustrates this through the experiences of Istina who 'knows the terror of madness yet acknowledges the prized core of humanity it contains' (Williams 38). Istina comes to acknowledge the human quality of her fellow patients, in contrast to the repeated animal imagery which the nurses use to describe them. Although Frame urges this identification with others, Istina's deep understanding of the patients around her is not easily achieved, as she must first come to terms with her own

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Frame's
use of
metaphor

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implicitly - to a
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Frame too is
repudiating separation
by urging on Istina
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efforts to achieve a stable, cohesive sense of self. Initially, Istina makes the same kind of vacuous distinction between the patients of Ward Four and those of Ward Two as people are apt to make in the 'outside' world, feeding on perceived inferiorities in others in order to make themselves feel better: 'Were we not the "sensibly" ill who did not yet substitute animal noises for speech or fling our limbs in uncontrolled motion or dissolve into secret silent hilarity?' (19). But, she realises, 'all of us whether from the disturbed ward or the "good" ward uttered the same kind of stifled choking scream when the electricity was turned on and we dropped into immediate lonely unconsciousness' (19), and this sense of the basic equality not only of all the patients but their equality with the staff and those whom society deems 'normal' remains with her after her traumatic experiences. This changing sensibility comes from Istina's resistance to the urge to think of others simply as objects or 'other', and a similar modification in viewing the self primarily as subject – her preoccupation with which can be said to result in her 'descent' into madness – and her realisation of the danger of such constant attention to oneself is one of the factors which enables her recovery. To do this, Istina must overcome her paranoia and anxiety regarding her own sense of self and self-worth: in short, she must overcome her own narcissism and identify more closely with others.

To use the term 'narcissistic' with regard to Istina may seem surprising, but it should not be, as it fits well the modernist type of hero or heroine. *Faces in the Water* is in keeping with the other two novels of the Withers trilogy which, despite the changing name of the heroine, are characterised by Frame's preoccupation with the marginalised, alienated individual. Contrary to popular belief, narcissism is less a form of 'self-love' than a disorder strongly characterised by self-hatred (Lasch 31), and as such it is strongly associated with the alienated individual, as the behaviour characteristic of the narcissist stems from the lack of a perceived 'stable cohesive self' (Bouson 16). Both the alienated individual and the narcissist, therefore, can be seen as battling to maintain an authentic self against the 'norms' of the prevailing society. The individual who feels isolated may become either obsessed with their own omnipotence and power over others, or have feelings of emptiness and powerlessness. These reactions make up the two kinds of 'narcissistically defective individual', according to Kohut, with the more aggressive behaviour typical of the 'archaic grandiose self' and the more passive reaction typical of the 'archaic idealizing self' (Bouson 16). More commonly, however, narcissism may be a combination of the two reactions, as personified in Tom Livingstone in *Intensive Care*, who manages to feel both empowered and powerless. In *Faces in the Water*, the conflicting feelings of neediness and the protective shield of rage that motivates Istina's more drastic behaviour are not in fact incompatible, but rather illustrate the two poles of behaviour characteristic of the narcissistic individual. Jeffrey Berman explains:

The narcissistic hunger may manifest itself in pervasive feelings of emptiness, depression, or dehumanization. The self is depleted because of the unrealistic demands imposed by an archaic grandiose self, hungering for perfection and omnipotence. The major anxiety experienced in narcissistic personality disturbances is the self's fear of fragmentation or loss of the idealized object.

(Berman 27)

Behind this at times contradictory behaviour 'lies an urgent need to reconstitute the self' (Bouson 17) which is perceived to be under threat. Kohut's writings on narcissism are important in emphasising the importance of empathy in the recovery process of the narcissist, and as such they provide a useful parallel to Immanuel Kant's emphasis on the importance of the reflective judgement on curbing the imagination. Berman writes that if 'dreams are for Freud the royal road to the unconscious, empathy is for Kohut the unerring passageway into the self' (Berman 30), and Frame's second novel illustrates, I argue, precisely the same point. For Kohut, it is chiefly the lack of empathy from the parent-figures in early childhood that causes narcissistic personality disorders, and this is generally due to the personality disorders of the parents which cause them to focus chiefly on their own sense of self (or their 'selfobject needs' as Kohut describes it) rather than the child's. 'Formative traumas', however, may also occur later in life as a result of a lack in empathic mirroring. Berman cites the case of Vietnam veterans, who are 'at greater risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder if they or their families are unable to talk about the severity of the war experience' (Berman 119), and this is certainly the case for Tom Livingstone in *Intensive Care* who withdraws into his own fantasies as a result of the lack of empathy he perceives in his wife. Kohut's identification of the importance of empathic mirroring for sustaining a healthy sense of self suggests the reason for the fragile identities of Daphne, Istina and Frame's other alienated characters. It is particularly potent for the women in the mental hospitals described in *Faces in the Water*, who clearly are not 'mad' but are the victims of such traumas as rape, miscarriage, or postnatal depression, or fail in other ways to fit the 'norms' of society, such as Dora, who suffers from dwarfism. In the 1940s and 50s, there were no structures in place to offer these women counselling or understanding – they were simply locked away.

Ch 3 - review

empathy

By using Kohut's identification of the key modes of behaviour and states of mind of the narcissist it is clear that Istina herself suffers from a poor sense of self and tries to compensate for this by searching for an ideal other.¹ Istina's unhappiness at home and her

¹ I wish to point out here that using any psychological theories in reference to Frame or to her characters is fraught with difficulty, as one runs the risk of being accused of the same narrowmindedness that

sense of 'failure' in comparison with her married sister who is now pregnant suggest empathic failures in her childhood. According to Kohut, the narcissist 'may be prone to states of *understimulation*, a feeling of deadness and empty depression' (Bouson 17), and this state seems to be Istina's predominant mood as she writes frequently of her despair at the hopelessness of her situation, a feeling which often prevents her from taking assertive action. The sense of her depression overwhelms the reader from the beginning of the novel, pervading even her own acknowledgement of the wrongful judgement made about her which results in her being labelled 'mentally defective' (43). Even while stating her intention to record her experiences some years later, her fidelity to describing her state of mind leaves her comments without anger: 'I will write about the season of peril. I was put in hospital because a great gap opened in the ice floe between myself and the other people whom I watched, with their world . . .' (10). The hopelessness is increased by the ever-present denial of the worth of her individuality which pervades the attitudes of the hospital staff and their 'treatment' methods. Efforts made to keep the patients in line are couched in terms of 'safety', metaphors of which litter Frame's second novel, but this inevitably means the safety of society and its ideals rather than the safety and well-being of the patient. On a mass level, the most efficient means of ensuring the co-operation of large numbers of patients is the use of shock treatment:

The new and fashionable means of quieting people and of making them realize that orders are to be obeyed and floors are to be polished without anyone protesting and faces are to be made into smiles and weeping is a crime. Waiting in the early morning, in the black-capped frosted hours, was like waiting for the pronouncement of a death sentence.

(15)

The most radical method of control is the 'ice-pick of a lobotomy' (16), which allows the agents of society to enter the brain and alter the personality of the individual, leaving only a scar indicating where 'the thieves, wearing gloves and with permission and delicacy, have entered and politely ransacked the storehouse and departed calm and unembarrassed like meter readers, furniture removers, or decorators sent to repaper an upstairs room' (216). The attraction of a blank mind with which to inculcate the values of society is obvious, and these methods of control work to deny the worth of the individual and, on a more sinister level, to create clones of those in authority. After all, Istina remarks, 'much of living is an attempt to preserve oneself by annexing and occupying others' (217). Significantly, it is the decision to

resulted in her wrongful incarceration in psychiatric institutions in the first place. It is certainly not my intention to perpetuate the myth that Janet Frame is in any way mad or schizophrenic, and it should be plain from my discussion that the lack of structures in place in our society with which to deal with individuals with a poor sense of self resulted in the institutionalisation of large numbers of women during this period. Throughout this chapter I distinguish between Istina and the experiences of Frame herself, and my conclusions of Frame's own opinions are encouraged by her comments in *An Angel at*

lobotomise Istina – a final, drastic threat to her authenticity – that results in her lowest psychological point, a point where she doubts even her own humanity: ‘I felt no longer human In the rush of loneliness that overcame me, at the doctor’s words, I found no place to stay, nowhere to cling like a bat from a branch or spin a milk-white web about a thistle stalk’ (215). Clearly, the prescribed ‘treatment’ of Istina contributes to her continuing depression and worsening psychological condition by emphasising her ‘otherness’ and difference from normality.

The threat posed by the hospitals’ treatment methods to Istina’s sense of self exacerbates her sense of alienation and feelings of self-doubt. She increasingly experiences feelings of ‘fragmentation, a frightening loss of a sense of self-continuity and cohesiveness’ which characterise the narcissistic personality (Bouson 17). Istina’s preoccupation with the smell of human decay which pervades the hospital – the ‘characteristic ward smell’ – is symptomatic of Istina’s awareness that her own self, and the selves of the other patients, is gradually being destroyed through a simple lack of understanding of her behaviour:

I had never shown aggression; I had never ‘flown’ at anyone. I had been only frightened confused and depressed and my appetite had decayed at the mercy of the powerful ward smell, like fresh meat exposed to the sun and the flies. For it was true – the smell had been like the sun, in that the world of Four-Five-and-One revolved around it and drew from it a desolate kind of life; and the smell was like the flies the way it sucked at the air and at our breaths and our clothes and the invisible apparel of our minds.

(89)

The awareness of her own vulnerability produces in Istina feelings of *overburdenedness*, ‘a traumatic “spreading” of the emotions, in particular the “spreading of anxiety”’ (Bouson 17) which correspond to Istina’s paranoia over the apparent facade of the hospital. The fact that these feelings of suspicion are continually treated as evidence of irrationality and ingratitude by the hospital staff leads Istina to doubt her own sanity and even her moral worth; she increasingly wonders whether the suspicions she has over the hospital itself are in fact discomfort at her own state of mind, as she becomes ‘more and more perturbed by its manifestation of evil’ (75). Istina does, however, seek to control her own behaviour, in spite of the fact that she has ‘acquired a permanent attitude of fear’ (221). During her solitary confinement she explains, ‘I tried to remember my secret rule which I had formulated in order to maintain my sanity. I forbid you Istina Mavet to panic in a small locked room.’ (203) These ‘irrational’ thoughts leave the reader with an overwhelming sense of the rationality of Istina’s fear and suspicion, as they are merely the product of a hospital system which, rather

My Table that although Istina is ‘based on my life and given largely fictional thoughts and feelings’ Frame does write ‘factually of my own treatment and my thoughts about it’ (p.194)

than providing compassion and acceptance, seeks to undermine whatever independent thoughts remain in the minds of the patients.

The ease with which the characteristics of the narcissistic personality can be read onto this novel suggests that Istina is the most fully depicted narcissist among Frame's characters and Istina is also the character whose recovery is most clearly drawn. Specifically what it is that allows her recovery, however, is only suggested rather than documented in the novel, but Istina's relationships with three key figures – Sister Bridge, Dr Portman and Dr Trace – suggest that her recovery is based on the establishment of a psychological milieu which allows her to experience the empathy and positive reinforcement of her self that she has previously been denied.² According to Kohut, the healthy or cohesive self is a bipolar construct which exists through 'the presence of an abiding tension arc between the poles of the self, the push of the ambitions, the pull of the ideals' and it is the 'sameness of the skills and talents' serving both these poles that give an individual the sense of his or her self (Kohut, 'Four Basic Concepts' 459). The two poles are established through a child's normal identification with selfobjects, of which there are two kinds: 'those who respond to and confirm the child's innate sense of vigour and perfection, and those to whom the child can look up and with whom he can merge as an image of calmness, infallibility, and omnipotence' (457). The first type is referred to as 'the mirroring selfobject' and is responsible for the child's ambitions, and the second is 'the idealized parent imago' which gives a child their ideals. Kohut decided that in a psychotherapy situation, the patients reactivated those needs for these selfobjects which had not been met in childhood, through establishing either mirroring or idealising *transferences* which provided 'a corrective emotional experience', allowing the patient to overcome their narcissistic tendencies (Siegel 168).³ As a result of these better selfobject relationships, the patient's narcissism is transformed into a greater capacity for creativity, empathy, transience (the acceptance of one's own mortality), humour, and wisdom. In *Faces in the Water*, Istina's narcissism is indeed transformed into these more positive traits as her relationships with three of her caregivers gradually come to resemble narcissistic transferences which enable her recovery.

² The names of each of these characters emphasise their positive influence on Istina: they act as a 'bridge' between the conflict presented by Istina's ambitions and ideals, on which she is able to be carried to a new unity of the self ('portmanteau'), after 'tracing' the basis of her problem – poor self-esteem.

³ Kohut never claims, however, that this results in a Freudian-type 'cure', as although the analytic process 'brings structure and firmness to the self . . . it does not bring freedom from the need for selfobject experiences . . . On the contrary, it enables the self to choose healthier, more appropriate selfobjects and to make better use of them for its lifelong narcissistic needs' (Siegel 168).

Istina sees in Sister Bridge an idealised selfobject who, through her empathy with the patients, offers her a source of sympathy, understanding and possibly love, which will act as a means of soothing the pain of her previous experiences. Siegel summarises the importance of this relationship as follows:

[t]he story of the idealized parental imago is the story of a wish to merge with the perfect other who possesses wisdom, kindness, vast knowledge, unending strength and a capacity to sooth, settle and help maintain emotional balance. Union brings wholeness; separation in any form brings fracture.

(Siegel 67)

The threat of fracture that Istina's emotional and physical separation from Sister Bridge produces results in the narcissistic state of *overstimulation* which is described as 'the experience of being overwhelmed by . . . an intense – and thereby self-threatening – need for merger with an idealized selfobject' (Bouson 17), a state which explains Istina's contradictory feelings of love and hatred towards Sister Bridge. Istina's open admiration for Sister Bridge's patience is regarded as threatening by the nurse, and Istina is forced to resort to alternative means of communicating her need for compassion:

This unself-conscious giving of herself to those in her care was a marvel worth watching, and it caused me great sadness when, one day as I was standing quietly by, she noticed me and knew immediately that I had been marvelling at her almost telepathic sympathy with the patients. She blushed, as if with shame, and turned angrily to me.

(10)

Sister Bridge's shame stems from her fear that if Istina recognises a kinship between herself and the patients she cares for, so too may others, which could result in the nurse becoming tainted with the mark of insanity. Her reaction is to show increasing hostility towards Istina, especially after she shares with Istina, in a moment of weakness, 'a moment of confidence which she always regretted and which caused her to show me the kind of antagonism often felt towards those who share the secrets of our real or imagined frailties' (138). Istina, then, is in turn encouraged and discouraged in her need to idealise the nurse. In reaction to Sister Bridge's increasing distance, Istina's need for an ideal selfobject becomes so strong that she loses the ability to distinguish between the nurse and that paragon of the virtues she longs for, the mother-figure: 'Who was she? Was she my mother? I wanted to hit her and to climb crying on to her lap and plead to be forgiven' (173) and, later 'Sister Bridge was my mother.' (175) Istina's violence towards Sister Bridge stems from the same urge as Daphne's violence towards Flora; both women lash out at their nurses in an attempt to break through their protective shield of unfeelingness and set free the love and kindness they feel

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are locked inside their hearts. Istina, especially, is unable to understand Sister Bridge's reaction to her violence, which to her is simply an act of love:

I knew that she would never forgive me, that our contract of enmity was signed and sealed, surprisingly enough, with my love which I had shown by rushing at her and thumping her soft belly, knocking, like a demand to be let in out of the dark, to seek shelter from the special storm cloud which hung over me dispensing a significance of private rain.

(176)

Istina's most violent behaviour occurs at this moment when she pushes Sister Bridge down the stairs, but it is clear from Istina's desire for 'shelter' that it is simply a drastic attempt to communicate her feelings, frustrations and need. Istina seeks to 'merge' with Sister Bridge in a last-ditch effort to regain a sense of self-worth and power. Her failure to achieve this results in increasing violence and anger, until she is caught in a terrible cycle of isolation and punishment, punctuated by her attempts to communicate her feelings of desperation. When Istina finally has the chance to tell her own story, the story that becomes the novel, it is clear to the reader that her most violent and destructive moments can be explained rationally when her feelings of betrayal are considered. Her suicide attempts spring from the doctor's broken promise that she will not have EST again (203); she smashes her head through a window after receiving two consecutive applications as punishment; Istina's lowest point is when she is told she is to have a lobotomy, which results in her attempt to run away. The gulf that exists between the hospital staff and the patients, however, prevents Istina's actions being understood as attempts at communication, and she is simply dismissed as '[i]mpulsive and dangerous' (23).

Istina's recovery in the novel works on both a metaphorical and a more literal level. On the one hand, Istina's 'cure' is relatively simple, occurring after she is gradually rehabilitated by Dr Portman and Dr Trace, who are the only 'normal' people in the novel to treat her as an ordinary person in her own right. Together, they act as mirroring selfobjects, who initially instigate and then reinforce Istina's positive feelings about herself in a healthy, non-grandiose way. It is Dr Portman who not only advises against the proposed lobotomy, but affirms Istina's self by telling her 'I don't want you changed. I want you to stay as you are' (219). The effect of this first positive statement about herself on Istina is instantaneous. She writes 'I believed him and trusted him' and so begins her recovery, aided by insulin treatment, which sees the hospital staff also paying more positive attention to her. Later, Dr. Trace suggests showing pictures to Istina and asking her to tell him about them. Although this does not occur, it produces a new confidence in Istina, who sits in the park 'thinking about the pictures and imagining the thousand and one stories I would tell to save my conscience and

my dreams from being chopped off' (221). Istina's confidence in her ability to do this results in the writing of the novel itself, which in turn tells the stories of the one thousand and one women in the hospital. Significantly, the two doctors also place their trust in Istina by assigning her tasks in the hospital, making morning and afternoon tea for the doctors (232), and asking Istina to help choose books for the hospital library. Istina's memory of that afternoon illustrates the importance of such positive events for her life as a whole:

Both formality and dinner were forgotten as we sat on the floor of the little library, choosing. Sometimes Dr. Portman read passages aloud and turned his own memories with their dark side to face the light. And it was late afternoon when, with a headache of happiness, I returned to the ward. And from that day I felt in myself a reserve of warmth from which I could help myself, like coal from a cellar on a winter's day, if the snow came or if the frost fell in the night to blacken the flowers and wither the new fruit.

(242-3)

With this event, Istina replaces her early memories of insufficient empathy structures with a new memory of positive reinforcement of herself 'as she is'. Istina's experiences with these doctors give her 'corrective emotional experiences' which enable her to conceive of herself as a stable, cohesive entity. This process is also carried out on those patients who have recently suffered a lobotomy, and explains in part the 'success' of the operation. The nurses lavish attention on the lobotomy patients with the result that these patients 'improve', until the novelty of their 'case' wears off and the nurses no longer single them out for attention. Consequently the patient's condition worsens and they may even have to undergo a second lobotomy. After Istina receives the kind of attention which treats her as a significant person in her own right, she no longer exhibits those symptoms of paranoia and fragmentation anxiety which plague the narcissistic personality, and she is able to leave the hospital and eventually write of her experiences there.

The writing of her narrative allows Istina to put into practice the empathy that she has obtained and to demonstrate the insight that she has gained into herself and others. By writing a narrative of her past, she is able to use her own experiences as the raw material of her narrative, as well as to gain an objective view of herself that is the product of her distance through both time and change of role. Istina does not, however, assume the position of an omniscient narrator: her authority is presented as limited and even under threat, by her inclusion of the nurse's advice that she forget all she has seen in the hospital and her own cryptic announcement that 'by what I have written in this document you will see, won't you, that I have obeyed her?' (254). Having experienced the total loss of self that her nightmare journey into Lawn Lodge and Ward 451 produced, Istina is now secure enough in her self to

be able to relinquish any claim to subjectivity; she even includes a note at the beginning of the novel that her character is fictional,⁴ although the misspelling of the name underscores Istina's continued resistance to the expectations of society. In writing her text, Istina also undermines the authority with which she depicts the lives of the other patients, by describing her desire to dress her fellow patients as 'ordinary people', thereby magically transforming them into ordinary people, 'people you meet on the street'. She acknowledges the naivety of such a wish, admitting that 'I could not presume to change the thoughts and feelings of my fellow-patients when they were known only to themselves' (169). Her inclusion of such a change in her own way of thinking emphasises that her insight is in fact learned, rather than simply a byproduct of her difference, and this succeeds in validating her authority so that Istina persuasively argues for the value of each patient's own private world:

in the end perhaps what I might have put in the place of their secret thoughts and feelings, the so-called 'ordinary normal' thoughts, would have been of less value to the sum of truth than the solitary self-contained worlds they had created for themselves. Their minds were planets in their private sky and their behaviour gave little evidence of their real night and day and the pull of their secret tides; their heavenly collisions storms floods droughts and seasons of strength.

(169-70)

In such an environment it seems impossible that the patients could understand each other, but in spite of their separate worlds they recognise that each fantasy, each 'mental disorder' is a result of the same loneliness, the same frustration at the lack of understanding shown to them. The patients are able, however, 'living in a time of prolonged war, [to move] closer to one another in spite of our separately sealed worlds, like glass globes of trick snowstorms . . . ' (195), and this shared community provides a model for wider society which becomes increasingly relevant after Frame's novels in her next phase.

In many ways, it is the stronger sense of authorial voice that allows Istina to give a clearer moral message than Daphne, whose message is split among her multiple functions. Istina's growing self-awareness enables her to pass on a message to readers that overcomes any boundaries between sane and insane and provides a lesson in dealing with others that is relevant to all sections of society. The description of Brenda playing the piano, for example,

⁴ I am aware that to assert that Istina writes this note is contrary to all other critical comment on this, as it is usually assumed that Frame wrote this as an attempt to distance her self and her own past from the facts of the narrative. The note is similar to the note at the beginning of *The Carpathians*, which poses the same problem. It seems quite straightforward to me, though, that as Frame presents the text as written by another author, so too must be the trappings of the novel, including authorial notes. To treat

is far more effective than the attempts to universalize the predicaments and experiences of the Withers family in the Epilogue to *Owls Do Cry*:

Listening to her, one experienced a deep uneasiness as of having avoided an urgent responsibility, like someone who, walking at night along the banks of a stream, catches a glimpse in the water of a white face or a moving limb and turns quickly away, refusing to help or to search for help. We all see the faces in the water. We smother our memory of them, even our belief in their reality, and become calm people of the world; or we can neither forget nor help them. Sometimes by a trick of circumstances or dream or a hostile neighbourhood of light we see our own face.

(150)

Unlike Daphne, Istina is able to see faces drowning in the water that are not her own; her journey into death, described in this novel through the hellish nightmares of Lawn Lodge and Ward 451, enables her to face fully her own disillusion and despair. For Istina there is nowhere else to go – she must either become completely mad, lost forever in a sealed world unable to be shared with anyone, or turn and face outwards, bringing wisdom to bear on the world around her. Rather than struggling to keep her inner world intact and completely separate from reality in the vacuum of childhood like Daphne, Istina chooses to re-enter the world of reality and experience, and to use her visions of despair and inner torment to understand those around her. The fact that Istina can also see her own face in the water from a vantage point outside her own body emphasises her distance from narcissism, and points towards the detachment and disinterestedness that Frame maintains is necessary for the artist in her later novels.

Istina's 'recovery' is seen by many as her spiritual 'death',⁵ but I would argue that it is both necessary and more positive than Daphne's fate in the Woollen Mills. Istina's recovery is altogether different to Daphne's, as it involves a change in Istina's attitude to herself rather than a complete change of consciousness. When looking back at her experiences, she shows that although she is now part of the ordinary world, she is not wholly of it as she has not forgotten her experiences in Ward Two and her responsibility to the other patients. Contrary to Frame's other alienated characters, Istina is now able to assert her difference from everyone else with confidence and without feeling that her authenticity is threatened. Istina's

the note as written by Istina would help remove the assumption that *Faces in the Water* is simply autobiographical, and is therefore more in keeping with Frame's purpose in writing the novel.

⁵ Marc Delrez, for example, finds that in *Faces in the Water* 'the restoration of reason once again provides closure and bereavement of the compound personality which is alive in the madhouse and which is characterised by prodigious empathy with the world' (Delrez, "Love in a Post-Cultural Ditch" *Kunapipi* 13:3 (1991), 115.

recovery and growing empathy and wisdom give her narrative an authority as she not only describes the reality of mental hospitals but also the realities of the real world. Istina describes Ward Four as resembling the 'normal' world, and makes an explicit comment on that world when lamenting that in Ward Two 'nobody was surprised at another's behaviour or speech or silence - for these were people's natural rights, like the customs of foreign lands. But here the patients seemed to be judging, to be exercising the civilized horror pain delight that form a protective crust over the deeper surgings of individual feeling.' (222)

In the Withers trilogy, Frame is concerned with marginalised individuals who feel powerless, and who therefore have more in common with the archaic idealising self. Istina Mavet is, I would argue, the most interesting of Frame's early heroines because although she is the most clearly narcissistic of the three she is able, because of her 'spiritual' transformation during the novel, to overcome this narcissism, transcending her self-preoccupation in a way that Daphne and Zoe Bryce (in *The Edge of the Alphabet*) are unable to. Although Istina initially lacks the inner strength shown by Daphne's resolve to retreat firmly into the world of childhood, her inner journey eventually results in greater strength of character as she is able to re-enter the 'real' world whilst retaining her authenticity: she becomes 'normal', but only on her own terms. This lesson lies in the significance of the title, as Istina and Frame together argue for the importance of refusing to turn away from those who are overwhelmed by the rigidities of our society – the faces one sees helpless in the water. Istina's learning of this lesson is inseparable from her own journey towards a healthy, intact sense of self, as evidenced by the narrative's movement backwards and forwards between Istina's two main preoccupations in both the novel and during her time in hospital: namely, her concern for the other patients, and her honest depiction of her own state of mind throughout her eight-year incarceration. The main movement, however, is from a state of mind chiefly concerned with her own mental wellbeing to one more preoccupied with the wellbeing of the other patients. This shift mirrors Kohut's ideal change in the state of mind of the narcissist, who moves from being overly concerned with his or her own situation towards an increasingly empathic stance where the wellbeing of others is of major concern. The maturity of *Faces in the Water* appears in many ways to be an aberration as part of the Withers trilogy, and it is tempting to regard it as a successful exploration of many themes and ideas that Frame was working through, and it is perhaps more successful than even she realises. The next phase of her writing sees her attempting to reconcile the demands of the self and the need to be aware of the needs of others in the 'real' world of ordinary society,

and she also begins to address the specific relationship that this difficult question has to the role of the artist.

CHAPTER TWO:

‘The incarceration of man within himself’: From *Scented Gardens for the Blind* to *Intensive Care*.

In this second phase of her writing, Frame takes a more critical approach to the imagination, and interrogates what it means to be imaginative. As a consequence, the focus of her novels moves from celebrating the imaginative individualism of characters like Daphne Withers and Zoe Bryce to concentrating on the relationship between characters who are imaginative and the rest of humanity. The result in these novels is the acknowledgement that the possession of imagination alone is not in itself worth celebrating, but that as human beings we each have a moral responsibility to others, and that the imagination is no different in being subject to this moral obligation. Only by using our imaginations in such a way that is consistent with our obligations to others can we produce something that is worth treasuring. The characters of the novels from *Scented Gardens for the Blind* to *Intensive Care* do not initially have this awareness of their responsibility to others, hence they are increasingly narcissistic. Frustrated at what they perceive is the constant danger to their ‘essential selves’ posed by interacting with others, they retreat inwards, escaping into their own private worlds of imagination, until finally they lose all notion of reality. Their relationships with others suffer, as the narcissist is unable to regard others as individuals in their own right, and in each novel Frame draws a parallel between the individual’s lapse in fulfilling their responsibility to others and the ultimate destruction of humanity that results from this failure. Each of the novels in this period of Frame’s writing, therefore, follows a similar pattern of development where the protagonists aim to communicate their ‘essential self’ to others must be revised after they begin to realise that an individual is in fact only part of the larger whole that is humanity, and that hence an individual’s fate is inextricably bound up with that of society at large. Unfortunately, for each of these protagonists this realisation comes too late: their ‘clear seeing’ is granted only at the moment of death; but Frame’s focus here, I would argue, is on the reader, for whom the novels’ warnings are intended.

This reading of Frame’s work may seem unconvincing, given Frame’s seeming insistence on the importance of maintaining one’s individuality in spite of modern society’s insistence that we be ‘adaptable’. I am not arguing here that Frame replaces her preference for ‘that’ world of imagination over ‘this’ one, but that in these novels she revises her view so that the dualism between imagination and reason or the individual and society no longer holds, and that the relationships among these elements become more complex. W.H. New observes that

in the novels since *The Rainbirds* 'Frame rejects a repeated reliance on dualities in experience, projecting now from her personal metaphors out to her interpretation of social conditions' (183), but I would pinpoint this rejection of dualism earlier, from *Scented Gardens* in 1963. As a consequence of this rejection of dualism, the imagination is perceived quite differently in the five novels written between 1963 and 1970 than in Frame's previous three novels. The imagination is no longer a static quality, endowing the owner with a 'higher' form of insight, but comes more closely to resemble Kant's conception of the imagination as a faculty of the understanding, which enables *knowledge* as well as insight to be gained. In distinguishing here between 'knowledge' and 'insight', I hope to convey the sense that these novels have a much stronger connection with reality than those of the Withers trilogy and that, rather than showing the kind of ethereal quality Daphne conveys, the consciousness of individual characters in these novels is altered in ways which have a definite impact on their everyday lives. Rather than being romanticised, the notion of 'imagination' is interrogated, until the imagination by itself comes to be regarded as merely fantasy; each of the novels in this phase of Frame's writing makes an explicit warning of the negative consequences of using one's imagination simply as a means of escaping from reality, while at the same time suggesting how the imagination should be used. The narrator in *Scented Gardens* notes that 'fantasies move in and take over territory, and, like words, set up their form of dictatorship' (93), and each of the novels I will discuss indicates what happens when one's fantasy becomes so important that the holder of the fantasy will go to any lengths to keep that fantasy alive and 'real'.

In stressing the complexity of the relationship between the imagination and reality, and the individual and society, I am arguing that the five novels that make up what I call the apocalyptic phase of Frame's writing have, like most of Frame's novels, been under-read by critics, who have focused largely on other themes – either the inability of language to allow genuine communication, for example, or the problem of finding and maintaining an authentic self in the modern world. Karin Hansson sums up the prevailing interpretation of these novels by concluding that '[t]o assert their selfhood in the menacing surroundings of technological society Janet Frame's characters have to choose between individuality and conformity', and she goes on to say that the novels 'illustrate the notion that it is only solitary, even asocial, individuals who can achieve authenticity and illumination' (Hansson 23, 35). The opposition between these two choices is enforced for critics by the cataclysmic endings of most of Frame's novels, particularly the five of this period, which are regarded as evidence of the undesirability of existing within society's norms. By predicting that 'Frame's habit of drawing characters who are in the process of, or in an advanced state of retreat from their

*de phing
of words
imagination*

society has in a sense led her into a *cul de sac* from which there is little chance of escape', Carole Ferrier makes the mistake common among Frame's critics of confusing the characters' beliefs and values with those of the author (Ferrier 202). It seems clear to me that in this period of her writing Frame makes a distinction between the mindset of her characters and her own, and it is characteristic of her writing during this period that she is far wiser than any of her characters. Most of Frame's critics have assumed that Frame's knowledge is limited to that shared by her characters, but in discussing these novels I hope to show that throughout each narrative, Frame is always at a point further along the path of knowledge than her readers, and it is in constructing a fictional narrative with less perceptive characters than herself that she hopes to educate them.¹

In varying degrees, all of the main characters in these novels have withdrawn from humanity in an attempt to 'find' or keep intact their own 'selves'. Erlene's lack of speech in *Scented Gardens for the Blind* signifies, according to Vera's book on speech organs, 'the incarceration of man within himself'; it is a judgement that equally applies to all of these characters, as each is less concerned with the future of humanity generally than with their own individual safety. Malfred Signal gives up her home, her family and her life to retreat to a remote island in order to discover her own essential self, or 'the room two inches behind the eyes'; in *Intensive Care*, Tom Livingstone spends his life in a fantasy marriage with his wartime sweetheart Ciss Everest while his grandson Colin abandons his wife and children to run off to Australia with a young woman, and both men eventually murder the objects of their affection when they fail to maintain the dream. Hansson's harsh description of these characters is accurate when she writes:

... few of the main characters are adapted to their own time or socially acceptable and, as often as not, they are so immersed in their peculiar activities and struggle for survival that other faculties and connections have been sacrificed. They are mostly stunted, ostracized, limited, persecuted, or escapist without a functioning vocational or social life, confined within their own selves while at the same time trying to avoid painful confrontations with the self.

(Hansson 34)

Hansson argues that the characters 'avoid social adaptation and the necessity of mingling with "normal" society in their own special way by locking themselves up in autism, muteness, epilepsy, blindness or mental illness' (34), but this not only puts the blame for

¹ There are, however, some notable exceptions to this limited critical viewpoint. See Jeanne Delbaere-Garant, "Death as the Gateway to Being in Janet Frame's Novels" in *Commonwealth Literature and the Modern Word*, Ed. Hena Maes-Jelinek, Brussels, 1975, 147-55; Marc Delrez, "Love in a Post-Cultural Ditch: Janet Frame", *Kunapipi* 13:3 (1991), 108-116 and Victor Dupont, "New Zealand Literature:

medical conditions unfairly on the shoulders of the sufferers, it also misses the attractiveness of the choices they make. Victor Dupont is more accurate when he describes the characters as having 'lost their footing' in the real world, after retreating to the imagination as a means of coping with the world:

[They] may at first have deliberately sought a refuge from reality in the world of wishful thinking and waking dreams, called up and dismissed at will; but their imaginations grow upon them more and more, become all-invading and resentful of intrusion from outside as of some intolerable pressure under whose weight their whole balance is felt to be lost. That universe of illusion they preserve and defend by every means in their power . . .

(Dupont 174)

Dupont's account of this process accurately describes the feelings of the archaic, grandiose narcissistic personality, who alters his or her behaviour in order to protect his or her fantasies of power and omnipotence. At worst, they resort to violence or abuse and at best to a complete disregard for the feelings of others. But like all of Frame's protagonists, these narcissists are also highly imaginative, and Frame recognises in these novels that it is not the possession of imagination alone which allows an individual to have insight and wisdom; even imaginative individuals can, in fact, behave inappropriately towards others. The result of this 'incarceration of man within himself' is an inability to feel concern for others, a selfish inhumanity with which Frame questions the very meaning of being human. The end product of this selfishness is the destruction of humanity, produced in both *Scented Gardens* and *Intensive Care* by the eruption of an atomic bomb, or in the other novels indicated by some other apocalyptic event. Thus Frame's novels do not predict the end of the world as an end in itself, but function as a warning against humanity's, as well as the individual's, continuing selfishness.

In contrast to Frame's concern for the future of humanity, virtually all of the characters in these novels are much more concerned with what they term their own individual safety. As narcissists, their major fear is of self-fragmentation, and their withdrawal from others into a fictional world signals their resentment against the way that their lives and selves are impacted on by the people and events around them. Each of the characters in these novels feels bound by the conventions of society, and the frustration they feel leads them to reject the world they live in and to live imaginatively in a fictional world. In *Scented Gardens for the Blind* Vera Glace deals with her position as an unmarried woman living in a country town with a domineering father by imagining a fictitious marriage to a man who subsequently

abandons her after their daughter is born. The characters of Edward and Erlene are fully imagined, but they share the concerns that Vera herself has. All are fixated on the notion of keeping their essential selves intact, away from the prying eyes and judgements of others, and this separation from each other is emphasised by their inability to see one another's point of view, illustrated by the fact that they each narrate entirely separate chapters. As a result they are all narcissistic, becoming so engrossed in their own lives that each member of the family adopts an imaginary figure as a kind of idealised parental imago, rather than relying on each other for emotional support: Erlene becomes dependent on Uncle Blackbeetle for advice and companionship; Edward becomes fixated on tracing the genealogy of the Strang family; and Vera imagines these two members of her 'family' while in reality sharing an empathic friendship with the real Clara Strang. X

Vera, Erlene and Edward all feel threatened by the others' emotional claims on them, and Erlene especially, as an adolescent girl attempting to make a place for herself in the world, resents the claim that her mother has on her. Erlene feels both threatened by her mother and resentful of her mother's inability to protect her from society at large: for Erlene death comes both from outside, in the form of hawks who have 'speckled Erlene's mind with Death', let in thoughtlessly by her mother who opens the window at night 'all the time interfering, interfering, as mothers do', and also from within the home. Erlene's mother is threatening in the potential for guilt that she poses as an abandoned wife who is about to lose the role of 'mother' when her daughter leaves home and so who, in dying a figurative death, comes to personify Death for Erlene: Death Hunting

Erlene felt sorry for her, but she was not really a mother, for her red flesh had holes in it, like wire netting, and it smelled like an empty cage from which the only creature that she had cared for and fed three times a day had escaped or was dead, lying in the corner; her mother was an empty nest spattered with the remains of people who had flown away or had fallen out and broken their necks or their hearts or been pecked to death by the hawks. Death, Hawks

(171)

Both Erlene and Edward feel that Edward's decision to leave Vera is, in fact, Vera's fault, which is also probably the widespread judgement of the town she lives in. This allocation of blame explains Vera's feelings of guilt and her certainty that Erlene's first words will be 'a statement of my guilt, a judgement upon me' (118). Like Erlene and most of the other characters in this phase of Frame's writing, Edward Glace is so locked in his own dream that his life is largely inactive; he prefers to dream how he would like to behave rather than enact it. Unlike Vera and Erlene, Edward appears openly concerned with humanity at large rather than being merely focussed on himself, but his role as 'saviour' is limited to recording the

genealogical lines of the Strang family. The reality is, however, that his obsession with these 'strangers' causes him to become 'estranged' from his own family and from the only way of life that offers any hope of a new kind of humanity.

Initially, each member of the Glace family rejects their connection to others, in an attempt to find and keep intact their self. Erlene's silence to Dr Clapper stems from her intuition that 'the corners and walls were her friends, but the door and window had proved themselves to be deceitful, with unexpected comings and goings' (129), and this vividly describes her feelings of distrust of language which can betray oneself to others. Vera – in her silence – feels a similar distrust of others, noting that sometimes 'when I move through my life I am lashed to the deck, wax is set in my ears, in order that I too may not be lured to destruction by the noise of humanity' (125). Vera's fear refers to the destructiveness caused by the lighthouse on the lighthouse keeper, but what she does not at this point realise is that the lighthouse, a modernist symbol of isolation, is what causes the lighthouse keeper's madness and not, in fact, the stormy seas of humanity.² Edward also refers to this metaphor, likening himself to 'a lighthouse keeper whose beacon shines upon three wrecks and he must choose which to rescue first, not realising that he had been deceived and there is only one wreck, Edward chose Erlene as the object of his rescue, his love' (86). The lighthouse keeper cannot isolate himself from others and then choose rationally which of three wrecks to save; saving others requires being connected in some way to them, otherwise it is impossible to reach them. Without this, the only wreck to be saved is oneself. Edward resembles the lighthouse keeper, in his narcissistic dream of being a kind of 'Adam' who records the generations of the entire world, but in order to 'sit at the right hand of God' he has chosen 'a family whose lives (he thought) were chronicled and closed, who could not transmit to him the pain of nearness, whose distance enabled him to pluck what he needed from the long-dead fires of their daily living – the indestructible bones of love' (23). These individual declarations of self-sufficiency spell danger for the rest of society; as Uncle Blackbeetle remarks to Erlene, this kind of life can only cause one chain of events: '[m]ass loneliness, mass fear, mass burial' (70).

Deceived
from
objects

7/2

Like *Scented Gardens*, the final novel in the apocalyptic phase of Frame's writing, *Intensive Care*, also chronicles the fate of one family whose members are completely absorbed in

² The narratorial voice notes that in spite of the fact that the lighthouse keeper is 'deprived of most of the amenities of civilisation, he remained, they said, one of the happiest men alive' (45), and Sutherland explains that the 'ironic insertion of this comment's source ("they said") underscores ambivalence toward any notion that isolation from society and release from normative social and linguistic laws constitute of themselves, freedom' (Sutherland 127).

themselves. In this, the darkest of Frame's novels, the disregard that these characters show for one another is taken to its logical conclusion, resulting in the mass slaughter of innocent victims and the removal of our ability to claim any possession of 'humanity'. In contrast to those alienated imaginative individuals who are given Frame's unconditional approval in her early novels, the members of the Livingstone family, although imaginative, are revealed to be self-absorbed and destructive to those around them. They lack any kind of sympathetic feeling for others and are little more than 'living stones', preoccupied only with their own private dreams. Like Edward Glace, Tom Livingstone spends his life in the past, constructing an imaginary life and family for himself out of his memories of the First World War and the love of his life, Ciss Everest; both men mistakenly believe that concentrating on one family – which is not their own – will save humanity from destruction. Two generations later, Tom's grandson Colin Livingstone reenacts his grandfather's obsessive adoration when he leaves his wife and family for the frivolous Lorna Kimberley. Like Tom, Colin is frustrated by the suffocating demands of a society which places on him an unending list of responsibilities '– father, husband, ratepayer, member of committees raising money for charity, sports facilities, community centres, a citizen, perhaps an aspiring mayor, member of Parliament – the list sounded to him like the equivalent of the witches' evil chant where before it had been his rosary of respectability' (*IC* 136). Driven by his infatuation, Colin attempts to completely possess Lorna, realising that he 'was out of his mind in the sense that he now inhabited the territory of Lorna Kimberley body and soul, and what was marriage and love but just that?' (140). For both men, however, their fantasies eventually possess them, rendering them unable to live any kind of valuable life outside their own fantasy.

Engelberg writes that for narcissists 'the realization of their own impotence to act comes as a shock: each uses his cruelty to manipulate others and themselves; all surrender, sooner or later, to the realization that they have expended their will, that the course of their lives has, in a sense, been devoured by their own self-absorption with it' (Engelberg 30). Both Tom and Colin Livingstone react desperately to the revelation that their fantasy is, in fact, a figment of their own imagination. Like each member of the Glace family they resent the intrusion of reality and of the real person, rather than the idealised version, into their life, and regard it as an attack on their own self, and their actions are motivated to attempt to keep that self intact. Tom feels that Ciss Everest 'had failed him, she had denied his existence, for since he had known her, his whole life had been built upon the memory of her' and he panics, insisting '[s]he had to, she had to know me. Where have I been living for the past forty-five years if not directly in her shadow?' (30, 31). Colin is bewildered and desperate, feeling that 'if he did not take some action he might shrink and disappear, Lorna had such power to annihilate

him. Unless her love continued to bear witness to him, what existence had he?' (140) Tom and Colin's acts of murder represent the final, ultimate denial of the separate individuality of the idealised objects, who have already ceased to be regarded as human and only exist imaginatively as a means of escape from the real world.

murder
of
idealised
objects?

Many of the other characters in this novel, too, at least dream of the deaths of their family in order to escape reality and the necessity of having to deal with others that simply requires too much effort and giving of oneself: Henry waits patiently for Pearl's death for his planned escape on a world-cruise; before the murder Colin dreams that his wife and three children are dead, leaving him free to love Lorna; and even Naomi, the most visionary character in the first two parts of the novel, dreams as a child of the death of her mother – again a murder although apparently accidental – and rids herself of Pearl by first imaginatively sending her to boarding school and later by denying her existence altogether, in order to dream of an idyllic childhood with her father which denies the reality of her upbringing. Tom also denies earlier the existence of Eleanor and his daughters in order to imagine an idyllic life with Ciss Everest and two imaginary children, May and Cecily. He imagines pushing Eleanor into the slurry pool at the brick works, and calmly eating his sandwiches afterwards, thinking, 'it was not even murder, it was nothing, nothing' (42). Tom's denial of any wrongdoing, and lack of any feeling about this imaginary action or his real cruelty to his family, indicates the general indifference of most of these characters to the feelings and sufferings of others. Naomi's poem points out that it is this lack of consideration that results in Colin's disastrous actions:

ch 5

And Eleanor is dead who bore
Naomi and Pearl
in a marriage where love lasted
less than a week followed by
forty-four years of heartbreak.

....

Colin will account for the days of everyone's grief
with four lives, a conservative tally
but this isn't war any more, only domesticity
the kitchen, Culin, kiln, the furnace.

(56)

Tom's cruelty starts off a chain reaction of selfishness and inward-looking behaviour in each member of the Livingstone family, which Naomi likens to a kiln, preparing Colin inevitably for his day of tragedy.

Colin's mother, Pearl, feels that she, 'more than Henry, was receiving a larger share of the blame if only because her bulk was larger' (162), but her bulk symbolises her withdrawal into

herself, and her refusal to admit to any feelings whatsoever. Pearl 'seldom thought about her own childhood. Her past, Naomi's past, was done with, dead, dead, dead, dead' (83), but the only thing that is in fact dead is the source of Pearl's emotion, as she is revealed to be inhumanely immune to the sufferings of the children she works with:

her work among the battered children, among bruises, broken limbs, burns where the flame had been applied deliberately, scars that could not be explained away by protecting, loving parents, children shocked dumb with such an air of inward defeat like members of a beaten army that they had made the move of such an army, retreating across a no-man's land to a place inaccessible to the enemy – battered child after battered child and no tears came to Pearl. She was brisk, businesslike with the children. And she did not cry or mourn.

(83)

Although it is on one level completely understandable, Pearl nevertheless has the same kind of selfishness as her father, choosing to focus more on her self rather than the real victims of the tragedy. Earlier, when Pearl hears the news of Colin's desertion of his wife and family, 'she was divided in her feeling between incredulity that Colin who had been given "everything an only son could have" should be so irresponsible, and her pleasant anticipation of the sympathy and help she could offer the deserted family' (157-8). Colin's mass shooting of Lorna, her parents and himself only provokes a categorical denial of any sense of guilt or responsibility, as she justifies her own parenting by saying '[a]t least he didn't have the childhood Naomi and I had, an insane father acting the War all the time, you'd think he was the country or the world' (85). Pearl's lack of emotion and interest in her husband and son have, however, no doubt contributed to Colin's behaviour, but she is able to dismiss this as she does not fully regard him as a person in his own right, only as a son. 'I didn't know Colin was so many people', thinks Pearl, and she possessively resents 'the divisions the reporters made from their privileged point of view of the circumference of Colin's personality, as they focussed upon the dead, the dead centre that was her son' (161). Neither Colin nor Henry have, in fact, been at the centre of her own life, as they become increasingly unreal, 'snake-thin deadly shadows', almost transparent, in contrast with the reality of her own bulk.

The failure of each member of the Livingstone family to take account of the concerns and feelings of others becomes a wider social problem in the third part of the novel. The Human Delineation Act will designate Milly Galbraith – a twenty-five year old 'doll-normal' woman – an animal, and will sentence her to death. Milly's description of herself as 'doll-normal' effectively describes the way that her surrounding community refuses to acknowledge her worth as an individual, preferring to regard her as some kind of doll or

'treasure'. Colin Monk initially regards people like Milly only as animals, but seeing her sitting in the pear tree one evening, he revises his judgement of her. His change of heart, however, does not render her any more like an individual than the label of 'animal': 'The little spy! I realised then that my reaction to her was as to an elf who might know more secrets than one would prefer, inhabit more places than was wise for the comfort of others' (179).

After finding and reading Milly's diary, Colin perceives that Milly's 'power' is an imaginative ability to see into the hearts and souls of others, including himself, where she sees the goodness that he has hidden in order to get his job done. Her imaginative construction of Colin's 'twin', Sandy, the reconstructed man, is a remaking of Colin with that part of himself that he denies and keeps hidden until he is finally unable to recognise that part of himself: hence the truth of Milly's statement that 'many people never know their own twin' (180). In shutting off his emotional part of himself, Colin becomes unable to recognise what is, in fact, a part of his own personality. This dissociation from himself is apparent when in his letters to Gloria 'I did not say that I missed her. Instead, I found myself praising the efficiency of the household machines and describing my satisfaction in working with them' (174). Sandy disappears, however, when the preparations for the Act are stepped up and Colin becomes increasingly hard-hearted at the fate awaiting those declared 'Animal'. Colin no longer thinks of those he will condemn as people; they are simply animals, or at best 'tragedies', and he manages to convince himself that some 'who had suffered much from their sad family, were happy to have their secret desires given official approval' (177).

The decision to implement the Human Delineation Act is so rationalised, in terms of a higher standard of living, that families and communities become merely individuals, who retreat inwards in order to save themselves. Frame makes it clear in this novel that appeals to the 'general good' are in reality motivated by selfish desires. Aware that they are living in a democracy, the Galbraiths and others like them are swayed by 'the sense of justice, the respect for the agreed law, strong after so many years of democracy, that ensured the successful enforcement of H.D.' (265). Milly's father does make some attempt to save Milly by visiting Colin Monk, and the day before the day of implementation he despairingly wonders 'Why have we not banded together?' (251), but he and his wife largely take comfort in the knowledge that it will be Milly who will be killed rather than themselves. They are able to set aside their affection for Milly and their recognition of her as an individual, and instead treat her increasingly as some kind of lesser person. Similarly, the visiting army officer sets aside evidence of Milly's intelligence and reason, preferring to defer to his notes

ch 5

Milly
part of
ch 5
authentic
representative
of
Norman

ch 5

appeals
to
the
general
good
are
in
reality
motivated
by
selfish
desires
aware
that
they
are
living
in
a
democracy
the
Galbraiths
and
others
like
them
are
swayed
by
'the
sense
of
justice,
the
respect
for
the
agreed
law,
strong
after
so
many
years
of
democracy,
that
ensured
the
successful
enforcement
of
H.D.'

slipping
into
to
conform

Democracy
(a) not really a
right with
hypocrisy
working
Cassidy

which 'are of necessity brief' (224). Like the Livingstones who have gone before them, the members of Milly's family and community all refuse to take into account the reality that does not fit into their constructed worlds. Milly emerges from her diary as a real person, complete with flaws. She is sometimes petulant and fickle, and as well as being able to see the good in others she is also sometimes irritated by them. She is not meant to be idealised as some kind of elf with eternal wisdom, or downgraded to an animal who is only useful in providing primary products – Milly asks only to be treated as most of the other characters in the novel ask to be treated: as a human being.

own biography
Evening
improving
Pamela's

The mass slaughter of those who are accused of wasting precious resources after a third world war is reminiscent of the Holocaust of World War Two. The parallels are even closer, however, than simply the similarity between fictional and real events, as Frame seems to make the same claims for the motivations behind such horrendous acts as Hannah Arendt does in her work on the Holocaust. In her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Arendt writes that in many ways the Holocaust is representative of modernity as a whole, the characteristic of which is a lack of proper judgement. She writes that in modernity '[g]one is the man of action, replaced by a mass man whose capacity for consumption [is] accompanied by the inability to judge, or even to distinguish' (Ingram 126), and her comments fit well the character of Tom Livingstone, but more especially those of Colin Monk and Edward Glace who, lost in their own private worlds of fantasy, have ceased to act responsibly, and can only dream.

Think about
Cecilia
the animal

Arendt writes that '[t]he trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that the many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal'. For Arendt, it is this normality which 'was much more terrifying than all the atrocities put together, for it implied . . . that this new type of criminal . . . commits his crimes under circumstances that make it well-nigh impossible for him to know or to feel that what he is doing is wrong' (276). In Arendt's account of his trial in Jerusalem in 1960, Eichmann emerges chiefly as a pathetic figure who, '[e]xcept for an extraordinary diligence in looking out for his personal advancement . . . had no motives at all' (287). Arendt emphasises throughout her book that Eichman 'merely, to put the matter colloquially, never realized what he was doing' [Arendt's emphasis]. It was 'precisely this lack of imagination' and 'sheer thoughtlessness – something by no means identical with stupidity – that predisposed him to become one of the great criminals of that period' (287-8). Interestingly, Arendt makes repeated references to Eichmann's reliance on clichés and his unimaginative use of language as evidence of his 'remoteness from reality' and

thoughtlessness, characteristics which Frame also emphasises in her novels of the same period.³

The characters in Frame's novels of this period all share a self-absorption and thoughtlessness that is similar to that shown by Eichmann. It is the same lack of an awareness of others that can lead to 'forty-four years of heartache' and the mass destruction of human beings: namely, a refusal to put oneself in the position of others. The ability to do the latter is the antithesis of narcissism, and is known as sympathy or empathy, although Kant refers to it in his *Critique of Judgement* as the maxim of enlarged thought. As I outlined in my introduction to this thesis, this Critique acts not only as an accompaniment to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, but it also curbs its more radical tendencies by supplementing the notion that one should think for oneself with the maxim that one should also think from the standpoint of others. It is when these two modes of thought are reconciled into consistent thought that one achieves cognition, or knowledge. Frame's novels from *Scented Gardens for the Blind* to *Intensive Care* offer overwhelming evidence that Frame, too, was concerned to restrain to a degree the artistic imagination, a process which was begun in *Faces in the Water* through the imaginative transformation of what are clearly some of her own experiences.

Cognition is the state of achieving objective knowledge, and Kant argues that by allowing the imagination to transform one's own personal experiences into a purposive frame of reference, the subjective knowledge achieved will indirectly lead to understanding between others. Thus the opposition between subjectivity and objectivity should be removed, as with a unified perceptive vision such as only the aesthetic imagination can provide, the differences between the two poles becomes minimal, and from this unity we can posit a more universalised truth which is neither subjective nor objective but both. Colin Falck argues that this unified vision was once provided by myth, which he defines as 'a form of integrated perceptual awareness which unites "fact" and "explanation" because it is a form of awareness in which fact and explanation have not yet become disunited. It is a mode of perception or of vision, rather than a mode of scientific explanation' (Falck 117). Falck distinguishes between factual, objective scientific explanation and the more subjective, essentially mythical explanations of pseudosciences such as psychology, in order to argue that the middle or reconciling ground between the two fields is 'the literary fiction or poem' which is the form that 'this unified perceptual

³ Arendt's book was published in 1963, the same year as *Scented Gardens for the Blind*, amid great controversy; it is therefore not unlikely that Frame may have read it. In any case, both writers have clearly Kantian ideas on the imagination and empathy. For Arendt's debt to Kant, see Ingram, "The Postmodern Kantianism of Arendt and Lyotard" in *Judging Lyotard*, ed. Andrew Benjamin, Routledge, 1992:

hermeneutic path to empathy

look at 101-106

picture form

and emotional inscription of reality takes within the rational framework of the modern understanding' (125). It is up to literature, therefore, to reinstate the unity of subjectivity and objectivity in order to reveal the reality or truth contained in literature which, Falck warns, is 'likely to be less like the intellectual acquisition of a certain kind of a piece of knowledge and more like the emotional acquisition of a certain kind of disposition or habit' (109). The revelation of a disposition is precisely what Frame does; rather than revealing some kind of 'truth', she shows readers the necessity of perceiving of others in a way that is similar to how we perceive ourselves, in order to behave in a way that is not only faithful to our own personal needs, but takes greater account of the feelings of others. It is a complicated, difficult path, filled with the potential mine-fields of possible self-betrayal and effacement, or the contrary 'human disaster' of selfishness and cruelty, but it is a path that does begin to be negotiated in *Scented Gardens* and *A State of Siege*.

The first step in acquiring this new kind of disposition is to acknowledge one's connectedness to the rest of humanity. Gradually each member of the Glace family moves toward acknowledging their connections to each other as well as to humanity at large, realising that 'no one speaks the truth when he asserts that he keeps himself to himself: there is no sealed container' (95). Edward begins to realise this when he thinks to ask Mrs Strang who she means by claiming that the convicted murderer is not 'one of us': 'Who do you mean? You are throwing stones, Mrs Strang, into the ocean of people, and do you believe that you should decide your boundaries by the ripples you create, that you should venture no further in your definition of "us"? Tell me, who do you mean by "us"? (105). The way our lives impact on the lives of others comes to fascinate Edward, and he becomes aware of our resemblance to each other, whether we like it or not, and that this should result in our bonding together:

there seemed to be a secret likeness between all people, as if some borrowed the characteristics of others, for a day or two, or kept them for life and for death, as if between the entire human race there was this contact, invisible exchanging and bargaining, transmitting of smiles and whims and gestures, in an attempt to efface all individual identity, to escape from the responsibility of owning unique essence and a name. *

(114)

Edward has begun to envision a world where humanity will be joined together in finding real treasure, and in helping one another to find it, like those

wonderful birds which stand on the seashore in groups and slowly turn over the stones to find their food, their treasure; helping one another in the task, no longer jabbing their vicious beaks at their fellows' flesh; only levering and turning the stones with their former instrument of death

(101)

Small R

Birds community

– and this vision of ‘humanity’ is not romanticised. Edward’s journey to England and his focus on the Strangs rather than his own family have given him the ‘necessary distance’ to perceive this unity and connectedness of humanity, but the voice that calls his name also warns that he has gone too far into the concerns of a ‘humanity’ removed from reality. Edward’s reliance on the chair – which indicates the passivity of his outlook, as it is not a pose of action – which will fit him perfectly indicates that surrounding himself with the concerns of humanity can be just as self-absorbed as rejecting humanity entirely, as humanity makes very few real demands on him. The voice warns him to ‘Start with man and wife, Edward’ and admonishes him for what is, in fact, his incapacity for action:

Could not you and Vera together have turned the stone of being? The seashore is a lonely place, Edward. And, Edward, do you keep saying, ‘In the future. In the future,’ because you really believe it or because you are only putting off the effort required of you to turn the stone yourself?

(101)

Edward has so isolated himself from his family that his return to New Zealand is an attempt to persuade Erlene to speak only because her silence suggests a dire future for humanity, rather than for Erlene herself. It is a response to his own fears, therefore, not an action born from any love he feels for her; Edward has already wondered if he ‘could sham the death of the entire human race in order to fool Death as he passes by in search for victims’ (93), and this reinforces the suggestion that his return to Erlene is a consequence of fears for himself rather than anyone else, and that these are merely disguised by his concern for ‘humanity’.

Erlene’s decision not to speak stems from her awareness that to speak is a form of death, as it makes her a victim of the judging scrutiny of others. Erlene is attempting to reject the roles offered to her by society; she is a postmodern character who rejects the restrictions of a society that refuses to see her in a fluid way that would allow her to transcend the assumption of any role. Erlene spends much of the novel dreaming and imagining, and her attitude towards dreams indicates her attitude toward the concept of ‘self’. Feeling that neither she nor her mother nor Edward is real, Erlene foreshadows the reader’s response to the characters at the end of the novel, when we discover that they are, in fact, invented:

It seemed as if the three had one night been given free passage in the world, emerging in the path of a dream from the mind of someone asleep, and preparing to fly on and on, as dreams do until they slowly dwindle to snowflake-size and nothing, when a strange guardian of the night had pounced upon them, seized them, forced them to account for their identity, in a way which dreams have no means of doing; they had been threatened, imprisoned as human beings, and denied their rightful blissful fate of dissolution. . . .

(175)

As Sutherland notes, '[t]he realist novel, and the critical practices consequent upon it, have trained the reader into complicity with the convention of denying, or at least masking, the source . . . to such a degree that to have the habitual role of the reader in constructing the text can be disturbing' (126). As we read, we read truth into the characters of the narrative, and the discovery at the ending of the novel that these characters are in fact imaginary causes considerable upset in the reader's mind. We experience a loss of meaning, and even a loss of self as our 'truth' is discovered to be untrue. It also causes us to radically review our assessment of Vera, whom we have 'judged', probably with less sympathy than she now, speechless, appears to deserve. Surprised by this discovery, we continue to read, expecting to discover a new truth, some account of Vera's real identity which will offer an explanation of her new role, but this is not provided, in a re-enactment of Erlene's refusal to account for her own decision not to speak. d 4

Erlene's final refusal to speak gains approval through Vera's muteness at the end of the novel. In the imaginary dialogue inside Vera's mind, however, Erlene's decision is not left uninterrogated. Although Vera is overtly concerned about the role she plays in Erlene's silence, and is thus as self-interested as Edward is in trying to make her speak, the revelation of Vera's own muteness at the end of the novel endows her opinions of Erlene's muteness with added weight. Vera complains that Erlene 'seems so infuriatingly self-contained', and maintains a belief in language's ability to communicate, believing that this communication itself is worth saving, in spite of Erlene's apparent distrust of language: d 4

as if there were never any need to speak, as if human speech were merely a bad habit, like war, politics, religion, picked up in the course of history with the leisurely aim of disposing of, entertaining or calming the human race; as if we could have managed very well with or even without the first few grunts and cries which survival has given publicity to, and gratitude has enlarged, and love has touched and shaped and offered a share of life, accepting death and nothingness in exchange. Is speech no more than a comfortable, satisfying habit? C

(118-19)

Vera emphasises that we 'cannot withdraw now, and stop speaking' as communication is essential, but she also believes in the higher power of language 'which arranges the dance and pattern of the most complicated ideas and feelings of man in relation to truth; truth; it, the centre; the circus, the crack of the whip, the feeding-time of the spirit; then the great striped tigers leaping unharmed through the fire' and maintains that '[i]t is something to hope for' (119). Critical attitudes towards this novel have assumed that the truth that Vera speaks of is a kind of modernist essential truth, but this is not necessarily so. It is more in keeping m

with the concerns of the novel for Vera to have in mind some kind of provisional truth, the kind that maintains our hope of making sense of the world, rather than attempting to construct a metanarrative onto it. This kind of provisional, temporary truth looks forward to that notion of truth explored in Frame's later novels and, more importantly, it is consistent with Vera's own notions of selfhood explored in her narrative, which comprises the main part of the novel.

Only Vera, who represents the present in this novel, narrating it and also creating the other characters, has the wisdom to recognise the necessity of beginning to love and accept the people around us before we may begin to consider 'saving' the rest of the world. To do this, however, requires placing oneself in constantly shifting relationships with others in order to be able to understand them without allowing one's own subjectivity to interfere. This requires flexibility in one's attitude to language, to others, and also to oneself, and it is this flexibility that Vera explores in her narrative. Vera is in fact very aware of the integrated nature of our own lives with those of others; she describes her awareness that 'I walked through the accumulations of four lives – my own, Edward's, Erlene's, and my father's; and the wonder was not that these accumulations had suddenly made themselves palpable, but that I had been able to move through them at all' (17). Vera's entrapment in these different lives, which personify the roles dictated to her by society as a single woman – daughter, and prospective lover, wife and mother – motivates her to construct a narrative which argues for greater flexibility between these roles. Vera is all of these at the same time, not simply a daughter, then a wife. Her decision to 'split' herself into three characters who either resemble or maintain the roles that Vera has played in her own life allows her to investigate what actually happens when we attempt to communicate with each other. By constructing three individual personalities who are in fact sub-groups of one mind, Vera is able to see the miscommunication and self-absorption which we all practise in our everyday lives.

In the fluency of the language of her own mind, Vera condemns the 'shut-down sell-out of the mind' that is practised instead of real communication, but ultimately this closed-mindedness can still exercise its power over her, so that eventually we discover that Vera, according to the new psychiatrist, is simply a 'poor devil' without, perhaps, 'anything human remaining' (190). Vera's 'new language' is related to the dropping of the atomic bomb, but it is also suggested to be the result of Vera's final loss of an empathic milieu in which to live her life. Both Dr. Clapper (who appears sympathetic to Vera's condition) and Clara Strang disappear from the narrative, rendering obsolete the communication system that Vera has established, and her final words can be regarded as a judgement on a society with too little

imagination or empathy to discover what she has to say. Vera's final words function, therefore, as a metaphor: a metaphor for the inhumanity of humanity, for the impossibility of being heard within this world. As Evans argues, it also stands for the potential that we all have to revise our close-minded practices and to work towards a new language that allows genuine communication to occur (*Janet Frame* 110). The 'answer' is metaphor – like the novel which functions as a metaphor – although this is not as clear in this novel as it will become later. The novel itself resembles how Erlene imagines the language of poetry: 'words in a language, nouns, verbs, adverbs, sentences [are] clipped like hedges and lawns into strange shapes that surprise you in the dark? Sentences with the growth cut back' (180). These words become 'pruned or picked, or marketed, arranged in shining bowls in shaded rooms of the mind' (133). Sutherland writes that poetry is 'the coherence of metaphor and ambiguity' (133), and in constructing a novel that is propelled by metaphor rather than narrative, Frame depicts a language that does in fact have a 'connection between signifier and signified (word and meaning) [but] does not seek to fix the relationship between the two' (Sutherland 126).

Wise
metaphor
new language

Let form
SG
whole Poem
poetic form

Like the other novels of this phase, *A State of Siege* begins by arguing that the visionary's place is outside society, but ends by admitting that without society, the visionary has no context in which to place themselves, and in fact has no function at all. Malfred Signal thinks that she has radically changed her life by leaving her home town and attempting to find her 'own essence, the pebble-core and simplicity of it' (169). Her plan to do this by turning 'against everyone I have known to claim from them the part of my essence that they possess, to fit together the claimed parts into a pattern of wholeness that I shall value more than an endowment as security for old age and death' (172) is unsuccessful, however, because it denies her relationships with others, and effectually denies the existence of her past self. The pebble of her existence becomes the stone which flies through the window and symbolises the hardening of her heart against those she has loved and those she has yet to meet. In the end, Malfred has to die because she has rejected the fluidity with which it is necessary both to interact with those around her and to conceive of herself. The rejection of fluidity is emphasised through Malfred's aim to 'frame' her 'New View' in which she hopes to give every object definition, including shadows. Malfred's reliance on the modernist belief in an 'essence' indicates her fear at her own attempts to break free of society's conventions, and underlines just how far she has internalised society's demands for conformity, as any flexibility in fact fills her with terror: '[s]he remembered, now, the fear she had known at the sight of the leaf and seed not completely imprisoned in a firmly

?
Paying the cost

defined BB boundary' (75). In the final moment of consciousness, Malfred realises the need to forego her preoccupation with defining and labelling:

I want only to forget the years of rigid shading, obsessional outlining and representation of objects; I want in this, still my preliminary dream, to explore beyond the object, beyond its shadow, to the ring of fire, the corona at its circumference; I want to find whether the fire is moving, leaping alive, or whether it is petrified, a burial of past fire, stone flames whose flight and dance are illusory in that they remain fixed for ever, as stone is rooted to its place of being.

(224)

But as Ruth Brown argues, Malfred cannot deal with the fluidity of the image of fire, therefore 'Malfred finds no essential meaning: she succumbs to chaos and she dies' (Brown 55). Malfred's quest raises important questions for all individuals, particularly the artist, and it is evident that in this novel the 'detachment of Curnow, of Chapman, of all those artists including often Frame herself, who comment on society as if they were not a part of it, is here called into question' (Brown 55). *A State of Siege* poses questions, therefore, for the artist and his or her relationship to society, and in the next phase of her writing Frame specifically turns to these questions and shows her readers how the incompatibility of the artist's view and society's demands can begin to be negotiated.

Society must learn to accommodate the visionary's view, so that the two worlds – that of society and artist – can exist alongside each other. These novels do not show how this can be achieved, only the danger in opting for one at the expense of the other. This novel looks forward to the next three novels, both in the theme of wholeness and the acceptance of one's past, as well as in the images of flexibility, namely shadows, which are repeated in *Daughter Buffalo*, but I have grouped it with the others here because the vision achieved is only fleeting. The overall tone of the next three novels is more hopeful, and the vision achieved more lasting. This second phase acts as a bridge, therefore, between Frame's insistence on the artist's or sensitive individual's isolation from society in her early novels, and the gradual acceptance of the artist's place within that society that occurs in the latest phase to date of her writing.

CHAPTER THREE

Learning to Live in the Maniototo: From *Daughter Buffalo* to *The Carpathians*

In this chapter, I will argue that in the latest phase of her writing, Frame makes claims for the importance of actively using empathy and imagination for the artist themselves, not just for society at large or individuals generally. I argue that in Frame's work, empathy and imagination can be seen to make up the two poles between which the artist must move if he or she is to create meaningful art. Frame's debt to the writings of Immanuel Kant and her similarity to the views of Heinz Kohut will become clear in this discussion of Frame's novels, as the dialectic established between the two poles works to prevent the artist's view becoming totally subjective, and at the same time helps the artist to avoid the temptation towards complete narcissism that is a necessary danger to the solitary artist. The acceptance of the notion of movement between the poles addresses the problem that Malfred discovers but is unable to solve in *A State of Siege*, as the pole occupied by the imagination offers the artist space in which to exercise their creative powers by transforming the mundaneness of everyday life into art, yet the pole of empathy necessarily curbs the sometimes egotistical leanings of the imagination by incorporating a sympathetic view of humanity and the struggles of human existence. Maintaining the connection between these poles is, according to Frame, the means by which the artist is able to achieve a semblance of transcendence over both the material world and the ever-present threat of death. This possibility is asserted through the dominance of different Kantian-type images in each of the novels *Daughter Buffalo*, *Living in the Maniototo* and *The Carpathians*, which testify to the necessary movement between the two poles of imagination and empathy. The result is a new hopefulness in Frame's writing, brought about in each novel by the protagonist's growing awareness of the relationships between objects, people and ideas. This hopefulness testifies to the resolution of various tensions apparent in the earlier novels and is identifiable in a new appreciation of the 'wholeness' of self and world.

By establishing in these novels a dialectic between the poles of imagination and empathy, Frame succeeds, I argue, in fictionalising her theory of the Envoy and the Mirror City described in her autobiography. In the three novels of this phase, the dialectic is expanded so as to incorporate many of Frame's concerns: in *Living in the Maniototo*, the poles are labelled 'art' and 'life', as Evans has noted ("Living and Writing" 78); in both *Daughter Buffalo* and *The Carpathians*, the poles can be seen as 'death' and 'transcendence', and the question of

how it is possible to transcend death becomes central to this period of Frame's writing. These 'poles' are emphasised by the establishment of an initial polarity between the protagonist of each novel with either another character or a host of characters: for example Turnlung is set against Talbot Edelmann in *Daughter Buffalo*, Mavis Halletton seems completely different from any other character in her narrative, and Mattina Brecon is set against the residents of Kowhai Street in *The Carpathians*. Gradually, however, these 'poles' draw closer together, as each protagonist achieves a better sense of self-knowledge and a better understanding of the necessity of travelling to and fro between the opposition of values that have been established. What all the novels have in common is that the opposition of the poles functions as a dialectic joined by the presence of memory. Various referred to in the novels as 'sanctuary', 'the manifold', or 'the Memory Flower', memory functions not as a static ideal but as an active process which, through the actions of re-collecting and re-memembering, contains the promise of wholeness and truth. The potential for this is most clearly depicted in the image of the hypotenuse in *Living in the Maniototo*, which occupies the same position as the manifold in joining the opposite and adjacent sides of 'art' and 'life' to form a triangle. As 'the sum of the square of the other two sides', according to Pythagorus's theorem, the image of the hypotenuse promises to contain in its wholeness any truth that exists.

Frame's debt to the writings of Immanuel Kant is most clear in this novel, as her emphasis on memory as the source of potential truth has much in common with Kant's theories of the acquisition of knowledge, and she adopts his term 'the manifold', yet characteristically alters Kant's conception of it to one that is truly her own. Kant relies on sensory images as the raw material for the representations in the manifold, but Frame transforms this to a reliance on sensibility, or inner feeling, rather than the senses, as the starting point for these images. Frame's manifold, then, resembles Kant's in that both are the collection point for the data collected by the senses, but for Frame this data can be both 'real' and imagined. Her manifold is not simply stimulated by the imagination; rather, her initial data are also a product of the imagination, allowing her to collect all of her experiences, real or imagined, in the manifold, which for her is 'all I had experienced, all of the stories I had read or dreamed' (LM 109). As Mavis notes, 'one does not really "collect" substance within the manifold, it is the manifold which does the receiving without choice' (108) and it is only once everything in the manifold is recognised as belonging to the manifold that the material can be shaped or transformed. 'The manifold' becomes 'the Maniototo' which, rather than being a loose collection of representations of the world as Kant initially perceived it, acquires through the controlling power of judgement, or empathy as Frame would have it, significance as a powerful metaphor for the imaginative space of the artist. The important feature of the manifold to note here is

that both Kant's and Frame's manifolds contain *memories* of ideas and objects. The only difference between Kant and Frame is the language they use to describe how these memories are recorded; Kant calls them representations, whereas Frame would probably refer to them as images or metaphors.

Frame
metaphors

Andreas Huyssen explains the significance of this reliance on memory in his book *Twilight Memories*, where he points out that 'all representation – whether in language, narrative, image or recorded sound – is based on memory' (Huyssen 2). This is possible because 'the temporal status of any act of memory is always present and not, as some naïve epistemology might have it, the past itself, even though all memory in some ineradicable sense is dependent on some past event or experience' (Huyssen 3). The negotiation of the gap between historical memory and the present point in time allows individuals to discover their own subjective form of truth, as memory, like everything else, 'is based on representations' and is therefore unable to lead us to some 'authentic origin' (Huyssen 2-3). Huyssen's argument that 'the fissure that opens up between experiencing an event and remembering it in representation is unavoidable. Rather than lamenting or ignoring it, this split should be understood as a powerful stimulant for cultural and artistic creativity' (3), is one that Frame herself seems to make in this phase of her writing. While carefully avoiding the lapse into fantasy that characters like the Livingstones make by ensuring that she adheres to the relative truth of memory, Frame celebrates the inevitable space between remembered facts and creates in each of these three novels an alternative world. The presence of memory in these novels is far from static, therefore, as it acts as a catalyst for a process of immanence for the protagonists, who in the act not simply of remembering but of articulating that memory, form their own realities and 'truths'. This entails an acceptance of the past and even of time itself, to a degree unmatched in any of Frame's other novels.¹ In short, each protagonist gains a better appreciation of their place in the world and even the universe, through the apprehension of the 'wholeness' or interdependence of every thing upon another. It is only ever possible to reach a state of immanence rather than transcendence with this vision, as the notion of immanence does not necessitate that language is able to describe it. Ironically, therefore, the appreciation of

¹ Interestingly, although the protagonists of these novels are, like many characters in her previous novels, middle-aged, they have an attitude more in keeping with the attitude of those middle-aged characters that populate what Margaret Gullette describes as 'the midlife progress novel'. Although I have resisted the temptation to dub Frame's novels thus, as many of the characteristics of this trend that Gullette notes do not quite fit these novels, her description of the changing attitude to time is particularly helpful. Gullette writes that middle age 'is the moment . . . to focus again on time: not time the boring abstraction, or time the destroyer, but time the purveyor of benefits. All progress narratives trust time. . .' (Gullette 45-6).

wholeness that the characters gain can only be glimpsed by the reader in the 'spaces' – both literal and figurative – of the text.

'Wholeness' can only be appreciated once perspective is gained by remembering one's experiences. In these novels, Frame makes a clear link between a character's ability to remember their past and their capacity to feel empathy for another. In all of the novels, this is achieved by an assertion of the shallowness or inhumanity of those characters who choose to erase the past or who fail to remember accurately. In *The Carpathians*, the residents of Kowhai Street, without memory, do not feel they belong to Puamahara with its legend of the Memory Flower, and each family voices a desire to be elsewhere. It is their lack of memory, we are meant to believe, that results in their inability to use language and their final disappearance from Kowhai Street.

The lack of memory is also rendered sinisterly in *Daughter Buffalo* and *Living in the Maniototo*, where it becomes associated with a selfishness that denies the 'wholeness' or 'messiness' of human life, as Talbot Edelmans and Mavis's friend Brian are shown to act with no thought for the feelings of others. An 'instant settler in an instant world', Talbot and the rest of his family have spring-cleaned their minds of any memories which do not fit into their 'smooth, rich and clean' lifestyle as easily as the cleaning devices which dominate their family home, rendering 'invisible all traces of hair, stains of living, dust, sweat' (DB 7). The result is that the Edelmanns are left living a life without feeling which really only replicates living, as it is without any emotions and what Yeats called the 'mire of human veins' which characterises human life.² The dislike of 'messiness' is echoed by Brian in the later novel, who resembles Pearl Livingstone in that he should be able to show his nephew Lonnie the same perception and compassion that he shows his patients, if not more, because he and the boy share a similar childhood experience. Brian is unable to do this, however, as he chooses not to pay attention to his own manifold. He can only relate to Lonnie at all by treating him as 'a new possession to be purified, cleaned and arranged. . . . He treated his patients with wonderful perception and compassion: they were not his crumbs on his carpet; they were not his opened wounds or memories. . . .' (LM 102). Mavis is aware that 'living alone for several years after two early marriages, Brian was reluctant to be reminded of the necessary untidiness, the wilderness aspect, seen and unseen, of human life' (102), and this wilderness

² These words come from Yeats's poem 'Byzantium'. Yeats's view has a major impact on the imagery of *Living in the Maniototo*, and will be discussed further, later in this chapter.

of human life is reminiscent of the 'bloody plain' of the Maniototo which is referred to at the beginning of the novel.

Like Peter Wallstead, the author Mavis refers to as having spent all his life in the Maniototo, Brian has retreated from the untidiness and wilderness aspect of human life, but unlike Wallstead, Brian does not live on a figurative Maniototo plain as he does not put his emotional distance to good use. Rather, Brian keeps his distance by maintaining an attitude of antagonism towards the 'messy' needs of others: '[h]is desire to clear the wilderness forever showed as soon as he came into the house each evening. "Who – spilled, tipped, tore, split, left, dropped, lost, broke?"' (104). Brian's lack of feeling is emphasised by his possession of an ice-pick for 'protection' which is meant, I think, to invite connotations of the danger of 'the ice-pick of lobotomy' Istina describes in *Faces in the Water*. Like Talbot, Brian is a scientist, a member of the medical profession, and as scientific men both believe in rationality over feeling. This is clear in Mavis's references to 'Brain' rather than 'Brian', but is more fully discussed in *Daughter Buffalo* through the polarisation of Talbot and Turnlung.

An old man, Turnlung is threatened with the loss of his memory, as part of the erosion which occurs before death. Turnlung prays for his memory, aware that only memory is what gives him the feelings of a human being. Unlike the buffalo he adopts, who has no ancestral memory, the possession of his memories differentiate him from both the animal kingdom and also those human beings who have no humanity:

I pray for my memory. Who am I,
Am I an H-man inhumanly immune
whose fragile agility rose like an army to quell
love lying weaponless at the bottom of the well?

(122-3)

As Turnlung has already explained, 'if you put the words "immune" and "inhuman" together, you may make *immune*, *inhuman*, and *H-men*.' (119). An H-man is someone without feeling who rejects the common humanity of the human race and rejects his own human status by aspiring to be god-like. It is associated with scientists, and the connotations that the term H-men suggests with H-bomb emphasise the annihilating power and inhumanity of both.

The novel argues that this lack of feeling and sense of humanity for individuals has a flow-on effect for society, so that now society as a whole is inhuman and driven solely by the forces of consumerism and power which leave no room for feeling any concern for others. This trend is exacerbated by society's general thirst for knowledge and the belief that knowledge can be gained through viewing others' experiences rather than one's own, which culminates in

Talbot's voyeurism in wishing to share in the death experience of others. The central concern of *Daughter Buffalo* is both Talbot's and Turnlung's search for knowledge of death, and the novel makes clear that on a superficial level, their search is unnecessary, as knowledge of death is available at the touch of a button on the television screen. The kind of knowledge offered by such a medium is not, however, satisfactory, as it fails to engage the viewer in any kind of meaningful thought or experience, and certainly does not raise our sympathy for the suffering. The prevalence of death on television screens in our own homes only succeeds in immunising us against death, as we are given more deaths than we can cope with, even being 'invited to witness them' as they happen (DB 42). The advent of television death has become so commonplace, in fact, that there is no need or desire to treat the deaths of those one personally knows with any special care. We lose, therefore, the need to personally come to terms with death in the more private, and in Frame's opinion, more genuine, space of the cemetery. Our subjection to the bombardment of death transports us to the public sphere, where we must cope with disasters, war, and genocide with no respite. The result is confusion and, finally, numbness:

The total confuses and sickens. We take out the dregs of feeling and gum them dutifully to the appropriate deaths, as if we were fixing stamps in a stamp collection, and we begin to fear that like the astronauts who walk on the moon we can do no more than record and file and exclaim, like creatures in a comic strip. It is not the birth explosion but the death explosion which threatens to bankrupt man of all that makes him human.

(42)

The cause of this numbness is the lack of a quiet space in which to rest from these continual images, and give us time to grieve or mourn, actions which would enable us to refresh ourselves for a new deluge of emotion:

... with the invention of radio and television we were suddenly given more deaths than we could cope with, and now we not only inherited them, we are invited to witness them. Where the written word allows us to siphon off small doses of death, the image in the moving picture does not even wait to invite us, it abducts us to the scene with the result that we have a collection of unformed, illmatured, ungrieved-over deaths in our storehouse and a scarcity of feelings to match them. The periods of grief, of mourning, are curtailed or lost, the death itself has no silence in which to become real; often our supply of feeling ceases, and aware of our poverty, while the deaths continue, we begin to hate; having no other feeling left to give to the demanding deaths we give ourselves, we become death as surely as those who love become the beloved, 'by just exchange one for another given'.

(42)

This is an important passage, pertinent to all of Frame's writing, and therefore worth quoting at length. It makes clear the two-way shift in how we come to terms with death. On the one

X wrong
between
overexposed
and
apostrophe

Q's ?
poem's shape
Curtains

Think of Silence
as penitence
privilege
got
truth??
how did that
fit

hand, our lack of feeling is caused by too much distance, as we do not experience these deaths that we see in any emotional kind of way, but only mediated through the television screen. On the other, they appear right in our living rooms in full colour and sound, giving rise to more feeling than we can cope with. The eventual lack of feeling is caused by this continual strain on our emotions, and it is this strain that ultimately deprives us of our humanity, because we are unable to distance ourselves enough to maintain our privacy and to feed our emotions in a more genuine way.

think is
ch 5

In contrast to the increasing inhumanity of society, Frame believes that the artist has a heightened sensitivity to the events of the world. The famous poet who dies in Blenheim is described as having this kind of sensitivity: 'some said that he was wearing his skin with the inside out and it must have hurt even to have the air touch it, and that he'd been born that way' (LM 55). This sensitivity is not, however, always a good thing, and the riddle near the beginning of the novel suggests that one's own skin can be a prison from which it is impossible to break free:

Riddle:

I make many riddles.

The sun has burned me. I bleed.

I break and mend. I knit.

I am a garment, a prison. I protect flower and seed.

I shrink and stretch, yet I always fit.

I'm a prison you must stay in.

What am I?

I am your skin.

think about this for wool made out of sheep's hair
live stuck or imprisoned
by someone
(14)

This danger is shown in the novel through the character of the artist Tommy, whose habitation in the grubby, unpoetic world of Baltimore leaves him no time or space in which to leave the concerns of his own life and the 'real' world and entertain his imagination. The final straw for Tommy is his inability even to dispose of his dog Connie's body in an appropriate way: "Where do you put dead bodies when there's no earth left to bury them in?" he asks (36). For Tommy, who has just returned from a successful trip to Paris, the threat of anonymity and uselessness that his inappropriate burial of Connie symbolises is too much. No longer strengthened and stimulated by the company of other artists, he lives 'without hope in poverty and loneliness' (35), and becomes a lost spirit like the ghost of Edgar Allan Poe who haunts both the city and the novel.³ Tommy is unable to find any respite from the poverty, the filth

ch 3 Dead
natural
process
of
Death
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in
modern
urbanity

³ Edgar Allan Poe seems to appeal to the artistic sensibility in his status as a solitary figure who is overwhelmed by the enormity of American life. Charlie Cantabile, for example, in Saul Bellow's *Humboldt's Gift*, refers to 'Edgar Allan Poe, picked out of the Baltimore gutter . . . The country is

and the incessant demands of living and dying in a poor suburb of Baltimore. His artwork shows his preoccupation with this need, as the globes of Mavis's earrings, locked in their lines of latitude and longitude so that they resemble cages, indicate Tommy's feelings of imprisonment in 'this' world. The open bird cage in his flat symbolises Tommy's potential to fly free imaginatively from the material world, but the sudden appearance of the dead bird in the cage after Tommy's disappearance signals his failure to achieve this (40). Tommy's erasure by the 'Blue Fury' is a potent symbol of the artist's inability to achieve any kind of transcendence over a world which prefers media images to works of art and is therefore unconcerned with the need to find space in which to deal with the more important questions of life and death.

- globalisation
cages??
freedom of
flight
double edge

In each of the three novels which make up this latest phase of her writing, Frame suggests that the only way to deal with the conflicting demands made on the artist is to find a space in which his or her imagination is freed from interruption and can make sense of his or her world. In each novel, this space acts a catalyst for the recollection of the artist's own memories, and through constructing a narrative made up of these personal memories, the artist is able to negotiate, on the one hand, the necessity of remembering the pains and joys of one's own experience and, on the other, able to distance oneself from that pain by seeing it in the perspective of the world. For Frame this becomes an imperative, as it is up to the artist to find the distance which makes it possible for him or her to reactivate the emotions we have buried and to restock our storehouse of feeling.

In *Daughter Buffalo*, this imaginative space is referred to as a sanctuary, and is able to be entered in the novel through its concrete form as the Natural History Museum. Huyssen argues that the museum in general fulfills 'a vital anthropologically rooted need under modern conditions: it enables the moderns to negotiate and to articulate a relationship to the past that is always a relationship to the transitory and to death, our own included' (16). The visits to the museum then, form an important part of the novel, as they give Talbot an alternative perspective to add to his death studies, and they allow Turnlung to negotiate his way towards his own death. His repeated intoning of the Latin phrase '*Testitudines crocodylia, rhynchocephalia, squamata, sauria, serpentes. . .*' serves as a reminder of the power of the museum which, 'fundamentally dialectical . . . serves both as a burial chamber of the past – with all that entails in terms of decay, erosion, forgetting – and as a site of possible

can be
seen as
a way of
stuffed
manipulated
exploration
of nature

proud of its dead poets. It takes terrific satisfaction in the poets' testimony that the USA is too tough, too big, too much, too rugged, that American reality is overpowering.' (Secker & Warburg, 1975, 118).

distinctions
contradictions

resurrections, however mediated and contaminated, in the eyes of the beholder' (Huyssen 15). As a 'burial chamber', the museum answers the need to find a quiet place in which to confront the reality of death; it serves to replace the function of the cemetery that has gradually been removed from society's consciousness to make way for the proliferation of images of death on our television screens. Turnlung regards the cemeteries as a kind of sanctuary which 'gave me relief from the attachments of the living' with 'their peaceful absence of tenacity where the hold, whatever it was, has gone' (59). With the loss of cemeteries

[t]here is no place now for the dead, or for the living to learn what the dead may teach them. The dead must be freeze-dried, reduced, concentrated like emergency rations, and when your memory needs to use them it must add the reconstituting ingredient which, formerly, the cemeteries provided in their peaceful laboratories.

(60)

Turnlung's notion of sanctuary is very different, however, from that of Talbot. In contrast to Talbot, Turnlung does not romanticise death as a kind of sanctuary, but regards the place of rest for the dead as a place to actively engage with the notion of death. The reconstituting ingredient of the cemetery is the acknowledgement of the life-cycle which is a part of every death. Both Turnlung and the headmistress whose story he recounts, are fortunate that their early experiences of death occurred in natural surroundings where it was still possible to see the natural progression of death. Turnlung describes how, after finding the dead cat under the currant bush, 'the purple flowers and the golden bees became part of the smell and sight and sound of death' (36), and these images enable him to face death tranquilly, as it becomes simply another phase in the life-cycle. His view is mirrored in that of the story of the schoolteacher, who finds that it is not simply enough to romanticise death, as poets and artists commonly do, but it is better to acknowledge the reality of it. Rejecting the 'concealments of literature', she prefers to place her sister's death 'among the animal deaths that concealed nothing, that continued naturally beyond the act of dying through the cycle of putrefaction, maggots, sculptured weathered bone, to fresh grass and buttercups' (75). This acknowledgement of the cycle of life is repeated in the Natural History Museum and evoked in Turnlung's repetition of the Latin phrase, as the elements of transition and metamorphosis in the recitation of the species enable us to see death as another stage in the process of life.

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Does
recount
that
back to
autobiography

Teacher 75
Death natural
cycle

More positively, as 'a site of possible resurrections', Huyssen claims, 'one might even see the museum as our own *mememto mori*, and as such, a life-enhancing rather than mummifying institution in an age bent on the destructive denial of death: the museum thus as a site and testing ground for reflections on temporality and subjectivity, identity and alterity' (16). In *Daughter Buffalo*, to acknowledge the part that death plays in the life-cycle leads on to an

even
museum
does

Through
loss
rather than
continues a very
solid a well
argued
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it is
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our
what

understanding of the integrated nature of the world as a whole. By keeping his memories of death, Turnlung is already aware that the sanctuary is a place in which to reconcile the opposites which the experience of death always presents: it is a place to come to terms with the absence and the presence of death. Turnlung collects his memories of death, and in the sanctuary actively re-collects them in order to make sense of death, which he perceives as a dichotomy between presence and absence. His grandfather's velvet-lined spectacle case, for example, holds both 'his life and his death' (37), while he perceives that when he finds the dead cat under the currant bush he is witness to 'the meeting of its presence and its absence, where before I had known each only separately' (36). Memories of past deaths help us to make sense of death as the final achievement of wholeness and purpose; 'having known life we are against death even when all the messages from the country of death convince us that our final role must be against that of turncoat – turnheart, turnlung' (27). Contrary to the modernist impulse to discover 'truth' or completeness through art, Frame admits through this novel that the ideal of such completeness cannot be achieved in life without the experience of death, which paradoxically grants one's life completeness at the same time as it removes life. Even at birth, we have not achieved a perfect finished state, but must accept the complexity of life that means that the newborn, whose 'heart . . . lungs . . . brain – are unfinished at birth, and yet having accepted life even they in their unfinished state must begin at once to struggle against death and secretly to complete their own birth – they, like the works of art, perfect through their built-in imperfections' (87). Life is like a work of art; we must not only struggle to complete our lives as we begin towards the ultimate completeness of death, but we must accept our imperfections and our lack of personal wholeness as part of the larger picture of humanity.

*wonder if all
could have
made this
dead as
alive
through
such a
speech*

Whether Talbot is influenced by Turnlung's view is difficult to gauge. He does grow in his awareness that those who have died were in fact real people, and Talbot regards them with new importance, seeing them as 'the old men who precede and shadow the young through their life, who rehearse their death for them' (22). In seeing this, Talbot begins to recognise that his own fate is inextricably bound up with that of the rest of humanity, as he sees that Turnlung resembles both his own father and grandfather, and that people who are strangers to us can also have an effect on us in spite of not being 'related':

I kept seeing him at first as he appeared, then as he was transformed into myself, my father, my grandfather, becoming them and shedding their skins like a creature in metamorphosis, then becoming himself but

out the many instances of 'twinning' which occur in the text ("Living and Writing", 83), and these 'mirror' Mavis's attempts to find patterns in and make meaning from her own life. It is the temporary, provisional nature of this construction which means that the result can only be 'immanence' – the glimpse of transcendence – that can be achieved, rather than a total, permanent form of transcendence. The gaps in these texts, where readers find things that do not quite make sense, function as metaphors for the spaces for contemplation which the artists in the novels find. They enact the 'silence' that Hassan identifies as a characteristic of immanence (see my introduction, 13-15), and they also serve as a catalyst for the reader's own contemplation, encouraging the reader to construct their own space in which they can make sense of the novel.

X review
Lit form

> Dying
Beats
of
Beats

Writing on
ourselves
to do
in the
same way
as we
are
originals
and the
image of
an
animal

The discovery of the hypotenuse is dependent, however, on the categories with which it is anchored. The hypotenuse must be limited by the poles of art and life, or as I would call them, imagination and empathy, to prevent the 'truth' which the hypotenuse offers falling into mere fantasy.

I am Hypotenuse.

Here burdened by the weight of opposite and adjacent
proved equal to others, never to myself,

I square with myself for the satisfaction of others who count

more than I

who lie as thin as a garden line in my fleshless body
who lie and square and cube and carry and join.

I am Hypotenuse. I close in

a shape that is nameless without my prison.

Larger than opposite and adjacent I yet suffer their corner

– creating presence.

(70)

The hypotenuse is bound by the boundaries set out for it by the artist, and it is up to the artist to establish those boundaries wisely and keep to them. It is important to remember that Mavis reveals at the beginning of the novel that it is designed to describe her experiences in Berkeley; this means that although the novel's events happen chronologically, the writing of the first part of the novel, before Mavis arrives to stay at the Garretts', occurs *after* the events in their house. Her authorial comments on the nature and function of the hypotenuse and writing generally, therefore, are the product of those experiences in Berkeley. Consequently, the reader finds that Mavis actually enacts this process of learning the necessity of maintaining a balance between the poles of art and life while she is staying in the Garrett's house. Mavis must learn to balance carefully between the solitary needs of the artist, epitomised in the 'garret' of the house in Berkeley in which Mavis shuts herself away, and the

name is to Corp??

back to Central
by the stone
reflected
either fiction
or genius

Maniototo, 'the bloody plain of human existence', which threatens to overwhelm the artistic soul. Hence the title of the section set in Berkeley is titled 'Attending and Avoiding in the Maniototo' which signals the necessary movement between the two states.

The many references to Yeats in the novel signal the desire for a balance between the poles of isolation and involvement in society, as well as reinforcing Mavis's search for a truth which indicates 'wholeness' rather than a single, denying truth. Contrary to many readings of the text, I do not believe that Mavis has a modernist yearning for truth, as she recognises that she lives in a postmodern world, and that consequently 'in a world of replicas the original cannot be matched in value, and the real fact is often a copy of the unreal fiction' (45-6). Thus the only means of discovering the original, or of making payment for our lives, is to pay for it 'in the sense that the blossoms pay for the spring by flourishing within it as part of it' (46). Her goal, then, is quite different to that of Roger, who dreams of finding 'a piece of reality that never had a shadow of a replica' (143), and they must be recognised as having different goals in order for the novel to make sense. What Mavis searches for is a means of grasping the 'marble complexities' and 'bitter furies' of humanity, and of reconciling them into an image of truth which grasps the superhuman which Yeats called 'death-in-life and life-in-death' in 'Byzantium'. This goal is not a modernist ideal but a turning towards that which encompasses all of humanity and is therefore greater than humanity or 'superhuman'. Mavis's initial declaration that she longs for a volume of Yeats's poetry is in fact an admission that she desires to escape the quotidian, as it is only the poetry of the 'paradisal Innesfree' that she wishes to find comfort in and emulate, not the poetry written during 'the time of the towering fury / when even the gentle dolphins not singing but gonging / like emperors, tormented the sea' (114).

The structure of the Berkeley episode suggests that Mavis is in denial over Brian's death; thus her arrival at the Garretts' signals her escape from the realities of life and death into the language of fiction, into '[a]ll the beautiful words that people have but seldom used, the wide, rich tapestry of language that could cover the whole earth like a feasting cloth or golden blanket' (26). The golden blanket becomes an important image for the consequences of the life of the artist, as it encompasses both the comfort to be gained from the creation of art, and also the 'suffocation' or avoidance from reality that can also affect the artist. The blanket is an equivalent symbol, therefore, for the artistic garret in which Mavis hides herself away: they both promise warmth and comfort as well as isolation. From these images it is clear that Mavis is attempting to shut herself off from the world in order to create, and the house and blanket are metaphors for the 'sanctuary' described in *Daughter Buffalo*; Bachelard writes

golden
blanket
sanctuary

that 'the house shelters day-dreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace. Thought and experience are not the only things that sanction human values. The values that belong to day-dreaming mark humanity in its depth' (6), and Mavis describes 'dreaming of all the house and blankets that had warmed me'.

Completely shutting oneself off can have a negative effect, however, as Mavis herself realises when she describes the 'sanctuary' of the Margaret Rose Hurndell Memorial Room in Menton, which gave her 'the kind of peace that one feels walking among the dead and listening, as the dead may, at a great distance from the world and its movement and noise' (227). Her memory of this sanctuary is not in fact a peaceful one – evidenced by Mavis waking and shivering with cold – and it becomes necessary for her to create four guests who 'interrupt' her solitude. Although Mavis resents the intrusion of the Prestwicks and the Carltons, their presence is necessary, as the warmth and comfort provided by the language of fiction is not enough to combat the feelings of loneliness: 'But the price of wool! The cost of the warmth has always been too great. I know, who live outside fiction where the cold wind blows across the waste spaces from heart to heart' (229). The real warmth of the blanket that is fiction comes from their contact with other human beings – 'the blankets were real, with real history and real power of warming' (228) – which signals that the basis of fiction must be real memories and experiences that are found in the manifold.

The four guests who arrive are in fact from Mavis's manifold, as they resemble either aspects of her self or other people whom we have met in the first part of the novel. Theo Carlton's bullying behaviour resembles that of Brian, while his wife Zita possesses Mavis's own consciousness of language, as well as her sense of alienation from general society as a result of her immigrant status in New Zealand, which mirrors Mavis's experience in psychiatric institutions. Roger Prestwick represents the artistic impulse that Mavis possesses, whereas his wife Dora symbolises the other more practical side of Mavis in her 'earthiness'. Mavis herself does not attempt to distinguish herself as someone completely different to her guest; she has the same resentment towards them that they feel towards her, and significantly she shares the same need for material possessions: 'It was the usual story. Only the still subduing heat of the day prevented us from climbing to pinnacles of intensity and crying out our choice of the Garretts' remains, one after the other, fighting for possession of our claims' (220). All five characters come to rely on the house for the fulfilment of their dreams, and the fictional death of the Garretts becomes 'necessary' in order to increase the possibility for this fulfilment. Mavis's creation of this death – an event stranger than fiction – signals that reality no longer informs fiction, but that fiction begins to inform and even replace reality, a change that links

her to the characters in *Intensive Care* and *Scented Gardens*. The world of the writer is necessarily narcissistic, as it requires the writer to focus on one's own life with an intensity that is not possible in an ordinary existence, but it can lead to grandiose fantasies of the kind that Roger exhibits. His desire to experience the desert, to discover 'a piece of reality that never had a shadow or a replica' is an 'arrogant, ambitious, unoriginal' dream (143), and it functions as a parody of the modernist desire to discover 'truth' or origin, as well as serving as a parody of Mavis's own desire to escape death by finding artistic transcendence, a desire which is suggested by her repeated references to Yeats's Byzantium poems. By 'playing God' in causing the death of the Garretts, it makes sense to suppose that Mavis may herself escape death.

From the present, Mavis looks back on her past self in Berkeley, describing with a touch of irony the satisfaction she felt at her escape into fiction: 'I'm sure I smiled in my sleep realising that I had won the golden blanket from the guests, unfairly, perhaps, but the price of warmth is often too high for too close a scrutiny of the means of getting it' (230). The price that Mavis pays is such a dislocation from fact that when she is suddenly jolted back to 'the shared unprivate world' of reality by the return of the Garretts (235), she experiences a sudden existential crisis and doubts her own reality. Her reaction resembles those of Tom and Colin Livingstone, as she seeks evidence to 'prove to me that I myself was not just a character out of fiction, a replica of a replica dreaming a replica of dreams, that I was paying attention and not in the world of total avoidance' (237). The value that Mavis found in her temporary escape into language was false, as while it proved a temporary haven, she discovers that a retreat into fiction – the combination of language and imagination – is useless without purpose and the intention to relate lessons learnt to real life. This can only be achieved by bearing in mind the wholeness, both of life, including death, and the manifold, which is that mix of experiences, memories and dreams which allows us to make sense of our own existence.

As a writer, Frame insists on the necessity of distance from the humdrum of everyday existence and from close relationships from others, but in this novel she shows Mavis becoming aware of the danger of removing oneself too completely from the humanity which gives life blood and raw materials to her work. Sometimes, however, personal involvement in everyday reality prevents the writer from being able to create something worthwhile, and this must be understood and celebrated as evidence of the continuing humanity of the artist. Earlier in the novel, Mavis has emphasised the importance of feeling, with particular reference to Lot's wife. Mavis writes that she will 'describe salt forms, and comfort Lot's

wife and Lot by reminding them that whether the turning is backward or forward, or toward or away from, or in or out, possession of a fixed salt being is no disaster; it is the essence of having turned or attended' (14), and this indicates that sometimes there does need to be a break in the creative flow, in order for the writer to deal with the crisis as an ordinary human being. Time, then, is used as a distancing mechanism to make Mavis's experiences more universal so that they have wider relevance for her readers and so that she is also able to keep them in perspective. This is achieved through the roles of Alice Thumb and Violet Pansy Proudlock, who are personifications of the tasks of the writer who collects experience (through the gossiping qualities of Alice Thumb) and then reconstitutes them into fictional characters (through the ventriloquism of Violet). After the return of the Garretts Mavis emphasises the importance of these characters, and in effect gives up her own attempts to make sense of her experiences by welcoming the distancing effect of time:

I had had enough, in the meantime, of the manifold, and the real and unreal 'marble complexities and bitter furies'. Of paying attention and avoiding. I reminded myself as I fell asleep that night that, once again, Alice Thumb would take care of everything, in time, that she would direct glances at or away from according to her judgement of the need, while I, Violet Pansy Proudlock, Barwell, Halleton, Alice Thumb herself, would continue to live and work in the house of replicas, usefully, having all in mind - the original, the other, and the manifold.

(240)

Ironically, in giving herself up to time, Mavis actually does transcend, in a way, the death that she is trying to avoid, as time becomes something to look forward to, and an ally in making sense of the world, as it does in *Daughter Buffalo* through the depiction of time in terms of the natural life cycle. This proves a more effective, more positive way of dealing with death than the attempt to be God-like, which is judged negatively in both of these novels. In allowing the construction of the writing to be undertaken by two fictional manifestations of herself, Mavis avoids both the narcissistic preoccupation with herself and the crisis that comes from complete annihilation of her self that is a product of the writing process: '[a] writer, like a solitary carpenter bee, will hoard scraps from the manifold and then proceed to gnaw obsessively, constructing a long gallery, nesting her very existence within her food. The eater vanishes. The characters in the long gallery emerge' (134). Resisting the focus on the self allows the writer to focus on language, and even to turn language into an ally.

*time to
winter
solidary
bee
nest with
goose ball*

*winter
solidary
bee
nest with
goose ball*

By distancing herself from the trauma of an experience, Mavis avoids the immersion into sentimentality or over-reliance on feeling that can result in poor writing. Roger speaks of the consciousness that the characters have to 'explain' themselves, and the diminishing of the self that is the fruit of the tongue blossom, or the impulse to use language to explain rather than to

hint at facts or emotions (143). Language should be used to suggest, rather than show, and in this way it resembles the hawk 'suspended above eternity, feeding from it but not of its substance and not necessarily for its life and thus never able to be translated into it; only able by a wing movement, so to speak, a cry, a shadow, to hint at what lies beneath it on the untouched, undescribed almost unknown plain' (43). This perception of language does not suggest a modernist belief in truth, but signifies the existence of an alternative world which language is generally incapable of showing. As such, the novel does not seek either to undermine all notions of narrative or meaning-making, it only argues that these must be flexible and dialectic, rather than fixed and dualistic. Mavis herself discovers that escaping the quotidian is detrimental to meaning-making, and she warns at the beginning of the novel that:

One glance
can annihilate the void dance
Looking away is the passion
day by day, year by year
the imitative fact hot from the mould of the original fact

'until we can no longer contain the cry
or live untouched in the house of replicas'

This poem suggests that it is *glancing*, rather than a fixed stare, which allows us to construct meaning, and that therefore language which suggests meaning does in fact allow us to make meaning of both art and life.

The Carpathians interrogates these claims made for both time and language by removing language as an effective means of communication, and increasing the emphasis on the importance of time as a distancing tool, by the removal of its corollary 'space' through the presence of the Gravity Star, which makes places both relatively close and very far away. These negative events are combatted through the presence of the Memory Flower, through which memory is asserted as a life-saving force. Mattina Brecon feels that she alone is saved from the disastrous events that befall the residents of Kowhai Street 'simply by her clinging like an insect at the point of destruction to the Memory Flower which had been a consuming reason for her visit to Puamahara' (151). Such a view entails regarding memory as an active process, not simply

as a comfortable parcel of episodes to carry in one's mind, and taste now and then, but as a naked link, a point, diamond-size, seed-size, coded in a code of the world, of the human race; a passionately retained deliberate focus on all creatures and their worlds to ensure their survival.

Quoted in
Hawthorne's
200's fragment
perception
of language
as a
consequence
as a limited

read

(171-2)

During the midnight rain that robs the Kowhai Street inhabitants of their language, Mattina not only remembers her home and family in New York, but she recalls past events that enable her to renegotiate her ever-developing relationship with her husband Jake. During this night, Mattina gives her thoughts 'almost entirely to memories of her past life and of Jake's almost unbelievable struggle to meet the expectations of himself and others by writing his second novel' (151), and becomes aware of her efforts to help him write it by feeding him morsels of the people she has met and the experiences she has had through her travels. This is really a major part of Jake's problem, however, as Mattina's efforts to help him write have removed that 'point of loss' which Mavis deems so imperative to use as a starting point for art. Married to the wealthy Mattina, Jake has not had to endure the 'many years of hard work, little recognition, unfair and fair criticism and poverty', as Mattina decides that '[n]othing would prevent Jake from fulfilling his ambition and the expectations of the literary world!' (134). Mattina's trip to Puamahara does not enable Jake to reassert himself as an important artist, but it does enable him to rediscover that germ of creativity which he has experienced in his past, and with this to regain a sense of the joy of life. Visiting the Memory Flower, he realises that its importance as a symbol lies in 'the ordinariness of memory . . . No-one need be special to be able to remember; everyone was rich in memory (195). Its importance lies not only in memory but in 'the human force that feeds the Memory Flower. "The force that through the green fuse drives the flower"' (95), and the similarity of sound between 'green fuse' and 'hypotenuse', emphasises the similarity of the significance of the two images.

What is significant about *The Carpathians* is that it is the novel that makes the greatest claims for the moral purpose of the artist, as well as the most overt justification for the presence of the artist in a postmodern society. Because of this, it resembles a provincial novel similar in many respects to the dualistic vision of *Owls Do Cry*, and as a consequence it seems anti-postmodernist. Mattina's assertion of the importance of the artist in preserving memory argues not only for the role of the artist, but also for the possibility of immanence even in a world as unrecognisable as that caused by the presence of the Gravity Star. It is the artist who can restore three dimensions to the now two-dimensional world, as they have already in New York

created a new dimension for the city, gave it depth, shape, and even were the city in reality a flat two-dimensional world, a scrap of paper or cardboard that could be torn to pieces, the shape and density given it by the artists lay unbroken in the world of the imagination, so that when outsiders looked at New York they saw not paper people in paper

buildings under paper skies but real people of flesh and blood and depth
in an adamantine city of height and strength, of all dimensions.

(104)

Mattina's belief in the creative potential of the artist echoes Malfred Signal's belief in the ability of a 'Ministry of Imagination' to provide a way of 'clear seeing' which could navigate the potential dangers of the new world order and lead humanity to safety. In Mattina's opinion,

if the naked reality of people and places were indeed flat, without substance, easily torn, then the work of the artists must be trebled or increased a hundredfold, to build the imaginative density which would reach into and clothe the naked reality, restore the dimensions destroyed by the extraordinary events and discoveries within an ordinary town and country.

(104)

In my opinion, *The Carpathians* is the least successful of Frame's attempts to argue for the possibility of immanence in a postmodern society, but this is because the focus in this novel is slightly different. The emphasis on the more 'didactic' role of the artist is perhaps even motivated by an attempt to pull more closely together the notions of original thought and enlarged thought that Kant deems so essential to human understanding.

In spite of the preoccupation with death and the problem of language, these novels are more hopeful than Frame's previous ones, and this is a result of the acceptance of these problems; rather than an avoidance of acknowledging them or an openly antagonistic approach to them. Unlike Frame's earlier writing, the protagonists of these novels are not victims; they realise that their authenticity and spiritual well-being are under threat, but they take steps to remedy this themselves. They are proactive rather than reactive, and the threat to their soul by the dominant culture is not presented as a polar opposition, but as a catalyst for change. As in Frame's apocalyptic phase, the importance of maintaining relationships with others is emphasised, and in these later novels it becomes one half of the equation that carries the hope of transcendence. This is not enough by itself, however, and the artist's assumption of his role in society must be accompanied by a space in which the protagonist is able to withdraw from the world for contemplation. The movement of each of these three novels is to outline firstly the discovery of the importance of humanity in providing meaning for art, and of this quiet place in which the artist is able to set free his or her imagination and then to accept the limited transcendence or immanence that they can perceive there.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Angel, the Envoy, and the Mirror City: Janet Frame's Autobiography

*Janet Frame's
Autobiography
to imagination
Vibha*

Janet Frame's three-volume autobiography can be regarded as an explanation of her own investigations into the nature of the imagination. The development of these investigations evolve in a pattern similar to the changing preoccupations of her fiction, and each of the volumes of the autobiography can be fitted neatly alongside the three broad phases I have identified in Frame's novels. *To the Is-Land* resembles, in particular, Frame's first novel in its romantic and provincial notions of 'imagination' and *An Angel at My Table* echoes the darkness of Frame's 'apocalyptic phase' in its retelling of Frame's suffering, blindness, and 'fall' into the labyrinth of mental institutions. The third volume, *The Envoy from Mirror City*, parallels the same discovery that Frame's most recent protagonists make: the emphasis shifts from the belief that poetic authority comes from the mere fact of the artist's point of 'difference', to an awareness of the higher value of wisdom to be gained from the transformation of one's own personal experience. The structure of the autobiography thus emphasises Frame's assertion of triumph over the facts of her own life, and Frame makes it clear in her autobiography that her conception of her 'self' is intimately tied to her concept of the imagination. It is once she finds a workable image for the creative imagination – one that allows the kind of creativity, flexibility and freedom of expression that she desires – that she gains confidence in her 'self'. The Envoy and the Mirror City, as metaphors allowing for the fluidity of creativity, define also, therefore, Frame's new flexible notion of her self, which is no longer tied to the romantic image of the 'tragic artist'.

Jones groups Frame's autobiography with other recent literary autobiographies and identifies the both *To the Island* and *An Angel at My Table* as provincial. Jones borrows Simpson's useful explication of the term 'provincialism' when he argues that the view of these writers tends to be dualistic: society is seen as 'homogeneous, dull, conformist, philistine, puritanical, bourgeois, materialist, Anglo-Saxon and hostile', whereas in contrast to this stands the isolated individual, the artist, as 'an island in a sea of mediocrity' and the people with whom he or she tends to sympathise and identify – 'the disaffected, the nonconformists, the deviants, the foreigners, the loners and losers' – who Jones defines as 'the spiritual elite within a dead society' ("Recent New Zealand Literary Autobiography" 128). The first two volumes are undoubtedly dualistic in their presentation of the world; as a child Janet Frame presents herself as an imaginative, sensitive child lacking in both material possessions and

provincial

89

Xd?

emotional support, and as a young woman who is unspeakably shy and unable to cope with the everyday realities of student life, due to her sensitivity and 'difference'. The definition of provincialism is problematic, however, as Frame appears to undercut the extent of her 'difference' at the same time as she insists on it. In *To the Island*, Frame insists that she was good at mathematics (A 114) and practical in her everyday life, as well as being imaginative. This shy, sensitive child could also assume the role of 'Fuzzy' at school and become 'a giggling schoolgirl who made everyone laugh with comic recitations, mimicry, puzzles, mathematical tricks . . . attempts at ventriloquism' (110). Frame's presentation of herself in *An Angel at My Table* continues this destabilising of readerly assumptions, and will be discussed later in the chapter. At this point, I am suggesting that in constructing her autobiography Frame adopts the characteristics of provincialism in the first two volumes for two different purposes. Firstly, she presents the younger versions of herself with a provincial perspective in order to emphasise her present maturity and wisdom, and prepare the reader for *The Envoy from Mirror City*. More radically, I would like to suggest that Frame adopts a provincial perspective in the earlier volumes precisely to parallel the movement of the phases in her novel writing, and this is a conscious decision to provoke alternative readings to her novels, which have been under-read by critics who have consistently failed to adequately discuss her aesthetic ideas and have relied instead on discussing what has become the mythology of Janet Frame.

The first volume of the autobiography seeks to show that as an adult looking back at her young self, Janet Frame believes that hers was an adequate conception of the artistic imagination - although she herself did not completely realise this at the time - and that her own interpretation of the 'imagination' was corrupted by the 'fall' into adulthood. Frame's belief is illustrated through the conflict between her own childhood views on the imagination and those of the adults around her, and the parallel she draws between the gradual questioning of her own ideas of the imagination and her increasing insecurity as an adolescent. The description of Frame's childhood conception of the imagination on page 101 of the autobiography is easily distinguishable from the other comments on the imagination in this volume; while these other comments, drawn from 'literary' ideas on imagination, have become hackneyed clichés, Janet's childhood view is startling in its honesty and originality:

I wanted an imagination that would inhabit a world of fact, descend like a shining light upon the ordinary life of Eden Street, and not force me to exist in an 'elsewhere'. I wanted the light to shine upon the pigeons of Glen Street, the plum trees in our garden, the two japonica bushes (one red, one yellow), our pine plantations and gully, our summer house, our lives, and our home, the world of Oamaru, the kingdom by the sea. I refused to accept that if I were to fulfil my secret ambition to be a poet, I

should spend my imaginative life among the nightingales instead of among the wax-eyes and the fantails. I wanted my life to be the 'other world'.

As Jones remarks, this is 'genuine insight into what imagination might be' ("Recent New Zealand Literary Autobiography" 144). Rather than stating an intention to withdraw from the 'real' world into an 'other' world, Frame is refusing the necessary journey into the false world of poetic convention that she is everywhere being encouraged to make in order to seem 'imaginative'. The concluding statement – that she wants her life to be the 'other world' – is an indication of how much her poetry is rooted in her reality, and expresses her desire that these facts of her life be acceptable as the material of poetry. This 'pure' vision of imagination is corrupted, however, both by the young Janet's efforts to 'fit in' and by literature itself. Deferring to the opinions of 'real' writers and poets, she becomes further and further removed from the strength of her own vision, and most of the other comments she makes in this volume regarding the imagination reflect this deference to the opinions of others. Even in the same paragraph as the one quoted above, Frame records her discomfort with her own conception of the imagination, as she writes of her reaction to L.M. Montgomery's Anne books: '[s]o that was how one should be if one wished to be 'imaginative' – the Shirley Grave characteristics again – dreamy, poetic. In spite of my longing, I remained uncomfortably present within the word of fact, more literal than imaginative' (101).

Frame works at seeming imaginative, and is drawn to poets that show these qualities, rather than those, perhaps, who possess real imagination. She does not realize that although these writers may have been imaginative at the time of writing, they have become clichés and serve only to distract her from her original purpose. This distraction is reinforced by the narrow-minded provincialism of her teachers and others around her, who cannot recognise genuine imagination when they see it, and in their insecure colonial mindset can only value those 'great' writers from Britain. Jones adds that '[t]his kind of corruption pointed towards a more insidious variety, the inner corruption of taking into oneself the stereotyped social view of the "poetic" and "imaginative" – dreamy, impractical, escapist – and then attempting to play the role in order to receive the recognition' ("Recent New Zealand Literary Autobiography", 144). In the same way that Frame relies on clichés in order to describe her attitude towards the imagination, she resorts to clichés and roles in her attempts to define her self, finally settling on a persona of 'difference'. This attempt to find a 'self' is hampered, however, by its constructed nature, which already begins to separate Frame from reality: 'I entered eagerly a nest of difference which others found for me but which I lined with my own furnishings'

and I adopted
symbols to describe
myself

(110). This process of separation from the facts of everyday life continues, becoming increasingly problematic in the second volume of the autobiography.

An Angel at My Table tells of Frame's increasing difficulties arising from her pursuit of the imagination. These difficulties stem, however, not merely from a cruel, unimaginative world that misunderstands her, but from her own confused ideas of what her 'imagination' should be like. Firstly as a schoolgirl and later when she is a student, Frame's concept of 'imagination' becomes increasingly disconnected with reality. By the time Frame arrived as a student in Dunedin, she had decided that she would 'attend Training College, and University in my spare time, impressing people with my imagination; everyone would recognize me as a true poet.' Looking back into her past while writing this volume, however, Frame concedes that 'I'd not yet completed the practical details of a poet's life as I found it beyond my imagination to make the transition from fantasy to fact . . .' (151). It is this impracticality that Frame offers as the real reason for her failure to write her College assignment on 'The Growth of Cities': '[a]s a result of cultivating what I thought of as a "poetic spirit" I had become impatient with everything I decided was "boring detail", either because I gave it little value in my ideal poetic world or because it reminded me that I was not as clever as I wanted to be and I was growing aware of, and refusing to accept the limitations of my mind.' (174)

At the same time as Frame's conception of her self becomes increasingly removed from reality, so too does her conception of the imagination, as she relies on an increasingly passive and romanticised image of it as represented by the 'angel'. The 'angel' is an image for the poetic muse that Frame hopes will inspire her and allow her to be both 'imaginative' and a poet, and I believe that this image as presented in the autobiography is meant to be interrogated by Frame, who now does not accept unquestioningly the role of such a 'muse'. Most critics assume, however, that it is intended to be a title of praise and perhaps awe for the artistic muse – as Jane Campion interprets it for her film, 'An Angel at My Table'. The effect for Frame's readers and film viewers is to overly romanticise the angel – Suzette Henke, for example, follows this trend in criticism by claiming that '[l]ike Blake and Rilke, Frame would eventually be visited by angels' (Henke 88). A more appropriate attitude towards the angel is the one taken by Michael King, whose proposed title for his upcoming biography of Janet Frame is 'Wrestling with the Angel',¹ which, I believe, successfully encompasses the complicated attitude that Frame has towards the angel.

¹ King, Michael. Opening address of the Association of New Zealand Literature Conference, Dunedin, September 1999.

Frame's angel is clearly based on Rilke's angel, as the title for her second volume of autobiography is taken from his poem 'Vergers', and the two angels share many characteristics. It seems to me, however, that not enough attention has been paid to the varied attitude which Rilke took towards his angel, particularly in one of his greatest works, the *Duino Elegies*, which feature the poet's imaginary dialogue with the angel. Rilke's letters indicate his perception of the angel as a kind of higher consciousness who stands for the poet's ultimate aim. In 1925 Rilke wrote that the 'angel of the Elegies is that creature in whom the transformation of the visible into the invisible, which we are accomplishing, already appears in its completion . . .' (*Selected Poetry and Prose* 551). The Second Elegy distinguishes between humans, who are depleted by their experience, and angels who, due to the transcendent nature of their being as 'Creation's pampered favourites', continually become stronger through their reflection of their own beauty and wisdom:

Early successes, Creation's pampered favourites,
 mountain-ranges, peaks growing red in the dawn
 of all Beginning, —pollen of the flowering godhead,
 joints of pure light, corridors, stairways, thrones,
 space formed from essence, shields made of ecstasy, storms
 of emotion whirled into rapture, and suddenly, alone,
 mirrors: which scoop up the beauty that has streamed from
 their face
 and gather it back, into themselves, entire.

But we, when moved by deep feeling, evaporate; we
 breath ourselves out and away; from moment to moment
 our emotion grows fainter, like a perfume

(*Selected Poetry and Prose* 339)

Later, Rilke described a vision he had in which

[e]verywhere appearance and vision merged, as it were, in the object; in each one of them a whole inner world was revealed, as though an angel who encompassed all space were blind and gazing into himself. This, a world seen no longer from the human point of view, but inside the angel, is perhaps my real task – one, at any rate, in which all my previous attempts would converge.

(*Selected Poetry and Prose* 569)

This passage is significant in relation to Frame because it makes the connection between the illuminated kind of vision that the muse promises and the danger of losing touch with reality when the world is 'seen no longer from the human point of view'. Rilke initially praised the distance that the angel maintained from the everyday things that preoccupy humanity, associating the angel with mirrors which emphasised this removal, but the mirror also emphasises the angel's preoccupation with himself – gazing merely into himself – and this presents problems for the artist who regards the angel as a model. Frame similarly uses

mirrors to emphasise her characters' distance from reality, as in the conclusion of *The Adaptable Man* when Vic Baldry is bedridden and confined to viewing the outside world via the large mirror over his bed. Both Rilke and Frame came to recognise the danger inherent in this kind of removal from humanity, which results in narcissism and a disconnected reality.

During the ten years he spent writing the *Elegies*, Rilke substantially modified his vision, finally rejecting the kind of transcendence offered by the angel until by the end of the series of poems he 'begins to rejoice in the limits of the human state rather than avoiding them' (Komar 210). In the Ninth Elegy Rilke works through his realisation that human beings can never hope to attain the angel's degree of transcendence, as the angel presides over the entire universe, and that what is unique to humans is in fact their existence on the earth. The poet's task is no longer transcendence but to accept the conditions of living – even death – and imaginatively transform them into something wonderful. Rilke's acceptance of this task allows him, in the Ninth Elegy, to write movingly of the value of human experience:

Earth, isn't this what you want: to arise within us,
invisible? Isn't it your dream
to be wholly invisible someday? —O Earth: invisible!
What, if not transformation, is your urgent command:
Earth, my dearest, I will. Oh believe me, you no longer
need your springtimes to win me over—one of them,
ah, even one, is already too much for my blood.
Unspeakably I have belonged to you, from the first.
You were always right, and your holiest inspiration
is our intimate companion, Death.

(*Selected Poetry and Prose* 387)

Komar summarises the movement within Rilke's *Duino Elegies* as a rejection of 'the older German Romantic quest for transcendence (which he seems engaged in as the *Elegies* open) in favour of a focus on the physical, human world'. Rilke's purpose is to 'take up the question of the function of the poet and poetry and conclude that the poet's task is to transform the physical world into the more durable and invisible realm of aesthetic space' (Komar 199). These comments could well be applied to Frame, who makes the same rejection of Romanticism in favour of validating human experience in both her novels and the autobiography. *The Envoy from Mirror City* is, in fact, Frame's description of the aesthetic space in which she transforms that experience. Before being able to write out this new view, Frame was able to add weight to her theory by choosing to describe the artist's life *without* the Envoy. She adopts therefore, the image of the angel – including its positive and negative aspects – as a metaphor for this difficult period of her life.

The angel's double-edged value is useful in helping Frame to demonstrate the complicated relationship that she develops with the concept of the imagination during her time at university. Although Frame encourages the reader to view the imagination positively again in this volume, most notably by citing at length Coleridge's description of the imagination (163), there is also a hint of warning in the lines that follow this quoted passage. The positive nature of the imagination is undermined, I argue, by Frame's admission that 'I was fascinated by the implied gap, the darkness, the Waste Land between Fantasy and Imagination, and the lonely journey when the point of Fancy had been passed and only Imagination lay ahead. It became my goal, a kind of religion' (163). These words echo the sentiments expressed at the end of the first volume, and indicate the danger of such a narrow kind of goal: 'My life had been for many years in the power of words. It was driven now by a constant search and need for what was, after all, "only a word" – imagination' (113). The link Frame makes between the concept of imagination and language foreshadow the feelings of imprisonment within this romanticized concept of the imagination to which Frame will later be subject, as it echoes her feelings of entrapment and betrayal by language as a child.

In the second volume of her autobiography, Frame's narrative acts as an investigation into the nature of that 'darkness' between fancy and imagination – when fantasy is easily passed, but the imagination is conceived of so inadequately that it becomes a trap which stifles the very creativity it is meant to stimulate. This investigation is achieved through the emphasis Frame places on her own complicity in the events leading up to her incarceration in Seacliff, and later in Auckland. Throughout this period, Frame's attitude towards the imagination parallels her attitude toward her own 'self'. As Frame makes clear in the autobiography her incarceration is initially the logical culmination of her role-playing: first as a 'quiet student, always ready with a smile (if decayed teeth could be hidden), always happy' which prevents her from seeking help (A 188); then as a 'born' servant which allowed her to 'erase myself completely and live only through the feelings of others' (200); and later as a kind of 'textbook schizophrenic' (202) which attracts the attention of John Forrest. The passivity of these roles is underlined by her treatment by both the staff of the mental institutions and Forrest himself: both are characterised by a total lack of interest in her own feelings and motivations. Of her first committal in Seacliff, Frame writes that '[n]o one thought to ask me why I had screamed at my mother, no one asked me what my plans were for the future. I became an instant third person, or even personless, as in the official note made about my mother's visit . . . "Refused to leave hospital".'(191) Similarly, John Forrest has limited

interest in Frame, preferring to regard her only in the terms of a romanticised vision of schizophrenia, rather than possessing an actual desire to help the woman in front of him. His 'diagnosis' is that she is 'suffering from a loneliness of the inner soul' and he likens her to Van Gogh and Hugo Wolf (201). Frame admits that this comparison 'was to direct my behaviour and reason for many years' (201). Hence, their interaction becomes based largely on an almost 'question and answer' format, where Frame offers fragments of textbook schizophrenic behaviour, while Forrest revels in his 'discovery' of such a clear 'case'. This relationship was useful to Frame, as it allowed her to pursue her role of schizophrenic artist and gave her an identity as the suffering poet whom she longed to be. Confining herself to this 'tragic' role which distinguished her from 'ordinary' people was no doubt an attempt to become more like Rilke's angel, who possesses distance from humanity by the mere fact of his being, rather than through any action on his part.

Frame's behaviour during this part of her life, then, is the same as those of her characters in her darkest novels, and it seems to me that this volume of her narrative invites this comparison. Possibly Frame consciously avoided discussing in detail her feelings and experiences in the psychiatric institutions in which she found herself, as she knew that many readers would be expecting some revelation of this and virtually all readers would focus on this part of the volume. Frame refers her readers instead to *Faces in the Water*, not only, I think, because the novel fulfils this need to discuss her experiences, but because her thoughts on empathy and understanding, and feelings of compassion and a shared bond with those patients does not sit well with the rest of this volume. Frame certainly mentions these feelings in the autobiography, but to discuss them at length would be to detract from her intention, which is I think to indicate how she pursued her ideal of her own difference and uniqueness to the point where reality became excluded. The wisdom of Istina Mavet does not belong with the Janet Frame portrayed in this volume.

Like Tom Livingstone and Vera Glace, Frame sought refuge in reality through role playing, and she openly acknowledges this in the autobiography. Time and again, as 'a blooming young woman of twenty-two with no obvious disabilities' Frame receives help by 'turn[ing] on my schizophrenia at full flow: it had become my only way of arousing interest in those whose help I believed that I needed' (212-3). In her autobiography and particularly in *Living in the Maniototo*, through the multiple identities of Mavis Halletton, Frame acknowledges the fluidity of the self, and does not claim that all such 'experiment[s] with our identity' (A 181)

are negative. It is when such roles become too rigid that they become dangerous: 'Temporary masks, I knew, had their place; everyone was wearing them, they were the human rage; but not masks cemented in place until the wearer could not breathe and was eventually suffocated' (A 188). These words parallel the events in *Intensive Care*, which shows the consequences when these masks become too rigid. Tom's gas mask and his work at the brick works symbolise the imprisonment of one's self when the mask becomes the reality. Unhappy, insecure and alone, Janet Frame herself came to rely on the mask of schizophrenia in order to deal with the world. While outlining the horrors of her experiences during her eight years in mental hospitals, Frame freely admits 'I had woven myself into a trap, remembering that a trap is also a refuge' (213).

Similarly, Frame's conception of the imagination during this period also acts as a kind of trap. Although her first published volume saved her life, Frame's narrative is full of doubts about the worth of her writing. Her first volume seems quite dissociated from her, as she has no photo of herself on the cover through which to claim it, and in fact has no copy of it herself which would prove its existence. Although she does continue writing after coming out of hospital, it is clearly a struggle, and the suggestion is, at least for this reader, that Frame's creativity is stifled through the limited perception she has of her own potential, which is presented literally in the text through the absence of any copy of *The Lagoon*.

The third volume is clearly intended by Frame as the key to her autobiography, and the image of the Envoy and the Mirror City also provide the key to understanding her method of creation and her theories on the imagination. The images of the imagination in this volume resemble those images in the latest phase of Frame's writing, in particular those from *Living in the Maniototo*: the Mirror City is to the manifold what the Envoy is to the hypotenuse. The Mirror City resembles the manifold in being a collection of images or representations, and like the manifold it looks forward to the end product, which is art. Like the hypotenuse, the Envoy is an image for the imagination that has the power to transform events from everyday life, producing a multitude of possibilities that make up the Mirror City. This potential is vividly described by Frame when she writes of arriving in London to find that her letter to the boarding house indicating her arrival had gone missing, leaving her without a place to stay:

'For a moment the loss of the letter I had written seemed to be unimportant beside the fictional gift of the loss, as if within every event lay a reflection reached only through the imagination and its various servant languages, as if, like the shadows in Plato's cave, our lives and the world contain mirror cities revealed to us by our imagination, the Envoy.'

The third volume provoked more adverse criticism than either of the two previous volumes, and this has centred almost entirely on Frame's handling of the two dominant images of the volume.² Broughton argues that 'the double image that supplies the title for the third volume . . . is in some ways a pretentious metaphor' (Broughton 231), and many critics complain that Frame is 'vague' in her explanations of these images. Garebian writes that the 'Envoy from Mirror City . . . is unsatisfactory, even on its own limited terms. Its diffidence is not simply psychological, but literary as well' and he concludes that Frame's 'reluctance "to reduce or drain into speech the power supply of the mind" is what is fatal to the book' (Garebian 32). Such comments, however, reveal these critics' failure to take into account Frame's suspicious attitude towards language, which is one of the dominant themes of her narrative. The reality is that for Frame there is no alternative to presenting her ideas as metaphor, as this is the most promising way of communicating with her reader in a way that will not be misconstrued. Frame places her faith in images rather than words, and in this chapter I wish to argue that when read as a concept of the imagination, *The Envoy From Mirror City* stands up as the most carefully thought-out theory of any offered in the three volumes of autobiography. In this volume, Frame produces an excellent metaphor that allows her to communicate her thoughts on the imagination, and in so doing she demonstrates her increasing maturity and wisdom in adopting a new guiding metaphor, whose major aim is not poetic romance or fame but human understanding. *The Envoy from Mirror City* is presented as evidence that she has learned from her previous errors in judgement, and this is supported by its adherence to each of Kant's three maxims of common human understanding, outlined in his *Critique of Judgement* and discussed in my own introduction (pages 9-12).

Frame
Suspicious
of
language
very
wise

In adhering to the first, the maxim of understanding, Frame underlines the relevance of her concept of the imagination as a means of communication. The criteria for this maxim is 'to think for oneself' and Kant emphasises that such thought is 'never *passive*' (CJ 294-5). In aesthetic terms, the major difference between Frame's conception of the imagination in the third volume of the autobiography and the earlier two, is that the Envoy and the Mirror City are both *active* images. In marked contrast to the angel at her table, the Envoy and the Mirror city are never passive, but demand constant mental activity in order to gain significance: 'as I write now the Envoy from Mirror City waits at my door, and watches hungrily as I continue to collect the facts of my life. And I submit to the Envoy's wishes. I know that the continued

² Vanessa Finney has written an excellent survey of the reviews of each volume, noting that most reviews of the first two volumes were favourable. Reviewers were not so happy with the third volume, however. See Finney, "What does Janet Frame mean?" NZJL 11, 1993: 193-205.

existence of Mirror City depends on the substance transported there. . .’ (A 434). The Mirror City is not merely a stagnant final product of the demands of the Envoy, but involves a complex process of shaping and displaying the raw material collected by the Envoy; it is ‘a world of fiction where I spread before me everything I saw and heard, people I met in buses, streets, railway stations, and where I lived, choosing the displayed treasure fragments and moments that combined to make a shape of a novel or poem or story. Nothing was without its use. I had learned to be a citizen of the Mirror City.’ (405)

The Mirror City is a metaphor for art, and as such functions as a metaphor for original thought. Importantly for Frame, as the city of imagination, it also allows subjective truth to exist: it is ‘a place where civilisations live their lives under the light of imagination instead of the sun’ (357). The light of imagination is not a bright light like that of the sun, usually associated with the blinding light of reason in Frame’s fiction, but it is a mottled light, the light which streams through the trees that the young Janet envisions in the first volume. It is a light that incorporates light *and* shadow, fact and fiction, thus allowing subjective truths to reign. Critics of the third volume assumed that the Mirror City was simply the city of the imagination and subsequently criticised the fact that ‘though she does not ever say directly – [Frame’s] literary preference is her way of living securely within “the city of the imagination” whenever the real city becomes threatening’ (Garebian 32).

It is not a case of just making a distinction between reality and fiction – everywhere in the autobiography Frame warns against making simplistic distinctions between truth and fiction – because Frame herself is aware that life is too complex for that. Rather, the Mirror City offers an alternative reality, a kind of heightened reality, where ‘truth’ is not pinned down and subsequently there are more possibilities for the real. It is important, however, to recognise the subjective truths of others, and in choosing a metaphor for the creative process, Frame becomes much more aware of the same creative process in others. Initially dismayed at the careless treatment her niece is bestowing on the ‘household treasures’ rescued from Willowglen, Frame realises that ‘even in my journeys to Mirror City I had abducted treasures from my homeland, placed them in strange settings, changed their purpose, and in some cases destroyed them to make my own treasures even as my niece was doing in her playhouse’ (433). In creatively conceiving of her own ideas about reality and truth, Frame is better able to acknowledge the subjective truths of others. This trend was begun as early as *Owls Do Cry*, but because of Frame’s emphasis on the plight of Daphne at the expense of the novel’s other voices, it was not fully realised. Frame’s demonstration of her increased awareness of the worth of other’s truths illustrates in part Kant’s second maxim of understanding, that of

judgement, or enlarged thought.

As I have demonstrated in Chapter Two, the maxim of judgement is especially important to the imaginative individual because it keeps a reign on things. For Kant, thinking 'from the standpoint of everyone else' is necessary in order to put one's thought to purposive use (*CJ* 294-5). It helps keep original thought in check and relevant to others so that it can indeed remain a tool for human understanding. In my opinion, Frame purposely answers the criticisms of those writers who have questioned her lifestyle and point of view. In so doing, she adds complexity and depth to the images of the Envoy and the Mirror City, and gains a more valuable metaphor. Reviewers and critics have complained for years of the inwardness and darkness of Frame's viewpoint, and the autobiography has, in my opinion, been misread in seeming to add weight to these criticisms. Agnes-Mary Brooke located Frame's complicity in adopting roles to suit herself, as in *An Angel at My Table*, but concluded that this was not out of necessity but simply a case of 'evad[ing] responsibilities or situations she disliked, and whose life, partly because of this, has taken on a particularly introspective orientation, with all its consequent disadvantages, as well as advantages' (Finney 202). Similarly, Susan Ash has repeatedly complained that 'Frame subscribes to and perpetuates the myth of the artist as elite, isolated being; that she almost self-righteously martyrs herself to writing and the romantic image of being a prisoner to language' ("The Female Artist" 186). Ash's conclusions come not only from misreading that 'Frame makes a conscious decision to privilege art and its creation over other experience' (184), as I think the autobiography argues precisely the opposite, but also from the unfortunate tendency to regard Frame's aesthetic ideas as only a poor second to her responsibility to provide a workable model of the successful writer for other, particularly women, writers. Ash does admit that '[m]y anxiety with Frame's choice to remove herself from the arena of 'living' is that she writes all to persuasively as if there are no other alternatives for women writers' (186), but unfortunately Ash's personal concern seems to have become a commonly accepted criticism.

On the contrary, I believe that in arguing for both the necessity of the transforming power of the imagination, and the gathering of life experiences, Frame adds to her explanation of the creative process and justifies her choices. Just as the Mirror City is not just the city of the imagination, the Envoy is not simply the imagination but has a complex role, acting as 'the link between the world of living and of writing' which resembles 'a high wire needing intense concentration for the barefoot journey (on knives or featherbeds) between' (340). Existing between the double demands of both fiction and reality is a complex business, as it is easy to choose one over the other. Frame herself makes a clear distinction between fiction

which relies too much on imagination and is not close enough to reality, and the kind of fiction which is the product of the Mirror City and the Envoy. She warns that '[t]here is a danger, however, in living at a distance from the source of one's fiction, for one so easily equates distance with death, and, rejoicing over the freedom of a story, one is suddenly faced with the curtailing effects of facts that have never undergone the necessary transformation in Mirror City; the writer has supposed that staying safe in this world and sprinkling a potion of distance-death upon a chosen ingredient of fiction, can result in the same transformation that occurs within the harsh lonely places of Mirror City. Instant fiction is as contradictory as instant future.' (418) If not used correctly, the Mirror City – or the world of imagination – can be contaminated by the intense feelings of one's own experience. After Bernard's departure, for example, Frame finds, in her pain and sorrow, that '[w]here before my surroundings (I supposed) had existed in their own right, the sky and the sea and the weather and the Mirror City, and I too had existed in my own right, with the island and its features as my companions, now all suffered an effect, not the Midas touch but the touch of ash' (353). Writing too intensely of one's own feelings, without subjecting them to the necessary distancing power of the Envoy or the shaping required within the Mirror City can hamper the creative process and lead to self-absorbed fiction that has little relevance for others. Part of this creative process is achieved through the distancing power of memory, which Frame likens more to a process of the imagination than a historical one, hence further blurring the distinction between fact and fiction or truth and reality.

It is just as important, however, to place the raw materials of one's imagination within the context of reality. This responsibility entails an openness to experience which Frame, early in the third volume, lacks. In Ibiza, the young, inexperienced writer believes that 'in such a life the presence of others is a resented intrusion and becomes a welcome joyous diversion only when the attention must be directed away from words, if only briefly, during times of travel and sickness' (340), but this oversimplifies the needs of the writer. Peace and quiet are not all that is required, and Frame learns that sometimes this kind of life is pursued at the expense of gaining experiences that will ultimately serve one's art. It is only after meeting Edwin that Frame ventures up to the upper level of the house she is staying in, and discovers 'a panorama of the city, the fields, the ocean, and the mirror city'. The moment is a significant one for both Frame the writer and the person, and it emphasises the Envoy's role as an information-gatherer and experience-giver, rather than being simply a dream-mechanism or tool for escapism:

I felt suddenly disappointed in my restricting of my spirit of adventure – why had I never explored this upper storey of the house? Passing through

the sitting room on my way to my bedroom I glanced always at the stone stairway as if it were a place forbidden, without realizing that it was I who had hung out the trespass warning, not aware that I was denying myself a richer view of the Mirror City. This revelation of the panorama from the rooftop when I had spent day after day huddled in a rug in my chair in my room, my typewriter on the table before me, my gaze when it strayed from the typewriter fixed only on the mirror city across the harbour, had the effect of an earthquake, shifting my balance, opening depths beneath me, distorting yet enlarging my simple view, as simple as the stare of the blinkered horse I had seen harnessed to circle the well hour after hour, to draw water. No doubt the water was pure and sweet, bearing little relation to the routine of the imprisoned agent working at the well, but I was not so sure that what had appeared on my typewriter was so fresh and sparkling.

(341)

Frame's memory of the event encourages the reader to pinpoint this, perhaps, as the reason for her continual widening of perspective in her novels: Frame's experience here is similar to Mavis Halletton's rejection of the world in order to concentrate on her writing, and finding that all she can achieve are replicas and false realities. The memory of Ibiza is also reminiscent of Malfred Signal's 'restricted view' that is so important to her in *A State of Siege*, but which ultimately robs her of any relevance to humanity, and leads her to die a lonely death. Frame shows herself now as beyond the mistakes of her fictional writers by refusing to romanticize the Envoy in the autobiography - its journeys are marvellous, but she concedes that the writing itself is a 'dreadfully awful fact' (391-2).

Process of writing

Frame's success in avoiding the traps that befall both her fictional protagonists and her younger, less mature self can be measured in the success of the Envoy and the Mirror City in enabling Frame to reconcile the opposing aims of her work. It also allows her to indicate how far she has moved from the provincial mood that predominates the earlier volumes, by revealing more of the post-provincialism that is apparent in her last three novels. Jones writes that

the Post-provincial stance is an attempt to move beyond the Provincial. New Zealand society is seen as a real, imperfect, living culture, its failure to live up to its own best ideals accepted as part of its human history. The artist, formed by it, need be neither expatriated nor alienated, but rather, accepting his society as he accepts himself, can be understandingly critical of its failures and can celebrate its virtues and its life as a unique social organism that has evolved through its own history in relation to its environment.

("Recent New Zealand Literary Autobiography" 128)

The success of Frame's depiction of her 'aesthetic space' lies in its dynamic nature, as it allows Frame to have consistency in her goals and her work; by showing her awareness as

part of as well as necessarily detached from society, Frame demonstrates her success in adhering not only to Kant's maxims of unprejudiced and broadened thought, but also her ability to maintain consistent thought. This is the third maxim of Kant's maxims of human understanding, and in his opinion the most difficult to attain; it 'can in fact be attained only after repeated compliance with a combination of the first two has become a skill' (*CJ* 295). Contrary to the criticisms of some reviewers, the *Mirror City* does not offer an escape from the 'real world' but is the mechanism by which Frame is able to live in the ordinary world. By being free to immerse herself in humanity, and then withdraw, as is necessary for the sensitive individual, Frame becomes able to remain 'in touch with the unalterable human composition that is the true basis of fiction, the great events of everyone's life and death – the returns, the losses, the gains' (423) and allow herself to feel, as this comment indicates, a new love for and kindness towards the human race, who treated her so badly.

There is no stronger evidence for Frame's repudiation of the solitary artist type and her connection with humanity, than her depiction of her own self in this third volume of autobiography. The insecurities and complaints of her treatment are gone, and she emerges as 'clearly a happier and more whole person' (Finney 201). This emergence is due less to the appearance of a new kind of self, but more to a lack of emphasis on her 'self'. In an insightful article, Simon Petch notes that

Janet Frame has said that 'belief in the self as God' is 'the endemic virus of psychiatry' (*Envoy* 118). It is also an endemic virus of autobiography, but one to which Frame herself is brilliantly immune. For her own sense of self, in her autobiography, is fluid, vital, splendidly open to renegotiation, ever reflecting on its own possibilities, and refreshingly conscious of autobiographical existence as a written and writing fiction.

(Petch 70)

Petch has certainly located the success of Frame's depiction of her 'self' in the third volume: she stops taking herself so seriously. She no longer focusses on her attempts to engage with and deal with the world, but simply presents how she has achieved this. Although insinuating that the writing of the autobiography came from the fact that she has 'never written directly of my own life and feelings', her feelings at the time of the events described in this third volume are left largely unexpressed, and make way for the new confidence which has characterised her 'present voice' throughout the autobiography.

The writing of Frame's 'self' is much less important in the third volume than indicating that her experiences are more important in their potential to be transformed into greater relevance for others:

if I make that hazardous journey to the Mirror City where everything I have known or seen or dreamed of is bathed in the light of another world, what use is there in returning only with a mirrorful of me? Or, indeed, of others who exist very well by the ordinary light of day: The self must be the container of treasures of Mirror City, the Envoy as it were, and when the time comes to arrange and list those treasures for shaping into words, the self must be the worker, the bearer of the burden, the chooser, the placer and polisher. And when the work is finished and the nothingness must be endured, the self may take a holiday, if only to reweave the used container that awaits the next visit to Mirror City. These are the processes of fiction.

*questing
mirrors*

(405)

Significantly, Frame's self in this volume is relegated to lesser importance than the act of writing, and it only benefits from this; rather than suffering from the kind of narcissistic preoccupation that characterises her 'self' in *An Angel at My Table*, in this volume her self becomes only equal in importance to the acknowledgement of her own complicity with the rest of humanity. As she writes of retreating to Suffolk in order to write, Frame describes feeling compelled to return to London 'where I was happy to be alone in the crowd, surrounded and sustained by the immensity of people, of the human race, who, although it – we – had destroyed or crippled much of the natural world, including my northern hemisphere sky, could still send representatives of the Mirror City, and though some might be lost there and never return there were always those who struggled home to create their works of art.' (408). The use of the plural pronoun – 'we' – in this passage stands out in contrast to the rest of the autobiography that tells the story of an 'I'. It is in direct contrast to the insecure Janet who recoils from using the plural 'we' when talking about student life in Dunedin, thereby insisting on her difference. It is an important change, as it acknowledges not only Frame's place within the ordinary world, but also that it is possible for others, anyone, not necessarily the different or the alienated, to also venture to the Mirror City and experience its wisdom and magic.

Frame's exploration of the nature of the imagination in her fiction is a deeply personal setting out of the contradictions that preoccupy the artist. The personal nature of her quest is apparent in the use of her own experiences in her fiction, and is confirmed by the similarities between the three phases of her fiction and the three volumes of autobiography. Despite the disappointment that critics expressed over Frame's decision not to describe in detail her experience in mental institutions, the autobiography must stand as a brave admission of not only her complicity in being incarcerated, but also of what she perceives are her personal failings. That Frame is now able to admit these faults is a result of the metaphor she has created for the artist's role, which successfully incorporates both the imagination and real

experience. The metaphor of the Envoy symbolises Frame's estrangement from the earlier self who idealised the imagination as others perceived of it; the imagination is now subservient to that image of the Envoy which encompasses empathy as well as vision. It is the imagination enlarged with empathy that Frame believes is imperative for ensuring the safekeeping of our humanity.

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